Growing Fruit Trees in Containers

Getting Started

With the Grow Your Own movement rooting itself in our everyday lives, people everywhere are enhancing their yards (and their diets) by growing their own fruit. Some are lucky enough to

Choosing the Right Container
Most people choose to grow fruit trees in containers for easy mobility. For this purpose, the ideal container size is about 10-15 gallons — substantial enough to support a tree, but small enough to move easily. This size is
perfect if you’re growing in a window or on a balcony or patio, so you can bring the tree indoors for protection when the weather starts getting too cold. It also comes in handy if you need to relocate your tree to an unheated garage, shed, basement or cellar during winter.

And containers are perfect for growing warm-weather varieties, like citrus trees, banana plants, or fig trees you’ll find at Stark Bro’s, in areas where the climates are cooler than where they grow naturally.

If you want to start out smaller, then try a 7-gallon container. As the tree grows in a container of this size, it will eventually become root-bound. At that point, you can simply re-pot it into a larger container. You will be able to tell that your tree has become root-bound to its current container by its lack of vertical growth. It will still produce leaves and even fruit at this point, but you might want to start looking for something bigger to support continual growth and increased production.

No matter what size you choose, your tree won’t grow at all for very long if it doesn’t have adequate drainage. Make sure the container you use has holes (usually in the bottom and/or sides), so that any excess water can drain, and air can access the soil. This will help you to prevent potentially fatal diseases like root rot.

**Planting in Containers**
It is important to choose the right soil. Potting soil is best, since it is specially designed for container planting, and it is easy to find at your local garden supply store. You should avoid using top soil, since it is prone to becoming compacted, and it will eventually cause water to run down the inside edges of the container and out the bottom, barely reaching the tree’s roots.

When you are ready to fill your container, you should first add a layer of gravel or rock to the bottom of your container to help with drainage. Then, add some of your soil mix for the roots to rest on, and place your tree in the center of the pot so that it is vertical and straight. After that, add the rest of your soil until the tree is properly situated in the container. Make sure to tamp the soil down around the tree in order to remove any air pockets, just like you would if you were planting your tree in the ground. Give it a thorough watering, and you’re set! Now we want to focus on what you need to do to take proper care of your potted fruit trees, so they can stay healthy, grow and thrive.

**Watering Potted Trees**
One of the number-one threats to a young potted tree is overwatering. Once the tree is planted in the container, it is very important to keep a close eye on it and only water when needed. While you want to avoid letting the soil dry out completely, daily watering may not be necessary. You should water when the soil is dry to the touch a couple inches below the surface. The sun may play a part in drying it out, so be aware of exposure to the location of your tree. This can vary if the tree is moved at different times of year.

Note: Mature trees in containers outdoors, during the months where they are in full leaf (late spring, all through summer), can’t get enough water. You might notice that water appears to run through the roots and right out the bottom of the pot. Your mature, leafed-out trees would benefit from daily watering, until the temperatures cool off and the trees begin to harden off for the winter again.

**Fertilizing Container Fruit Trees**
Many potting soil mixes come with fertilizer included. If you are using a mix like that, then you will not need to fertilize additionally at planting time. However, you may choose to fertilize during the growing season. If you do, be sure to use a water-soluble fertilizer, like Stark® Tre-Pep®, so that the roots are able to absorb the nutrients successfully.

**Winterizing Trees in Containers**
Just like trees planted in your yard or anywhere outdoors, trees in containers benefit from winter care and protection. After your tree becomes dormant in the fall, there are a few important actions you should take:
• Pruning will give you the chance to remove any damaged, dead or diseased limbs, and it plays a key role in the survival, stimulation, shaping and production of your tree.
• Watering the soil around the roots will help to avoid freeze damage if you have not yet prepared to bring your container indoors, and the weather calls for a cold snap.
• Mulching over the surface of the soil helps to insulate the roots and protect them from the winter elements if your potted tree must remain outdoors for the winter.

When it comes down to it, growing fruit trees in containers can be just like growing them in a backyard. With the same kind of care, you can have your very own container orchard on your balcony, patio, sunroom or wherever you want!

**MEMORIES**

My Dad is cleaning out my grandmother's house and he brought me an old Royal Crown Cola bottle. In the bottle top was a stopper with a bunch of holes in it. I knew immediately what it was, but my daughter had no idea. She thought they had tried to make it a salt shaker or something I knew it as the bottle that sat on the end of the ironing board to 'sprinkle' clothes with because we didn't have steam irons. Man, I am old.

**How many do you remember?**

Head lights dimmer switches on the floor.
Ignition switches on the dashboard.
Heaters mounted on the inside of the fire wall.
Real ice boxes.
Pant leg clips for bicycles without chain guards.
Soldering (hair curling rods too) irons you heat on a gas burner.
Using hand signals for cars without turn signals..

**Older Than Dirt Quiz :**

Count all the ones that you remember not the ones you were told about.
Ratings at the bottom.

1. Blackjack chewing gum
2. Wax Coke-shaped bottles with colored sugar water
3. Candy cigarettes
4. Soda pop machines that dispensed glass bottles
5. Coffee shops or diners with tableside juke boxes
6. Home milk delivery in glass bottles with cardboard stoppers, and in winter they would freeze with the stopper on top of the ice.
7. Party lines on the telephone
8. Newsreels and cartoons before the movie
9. P.F. Flyers
10. Butch wax
11. TV test patterns that came on at night after the last show and were there until TV shows started again in the morning. (there were only 3 channels [ if you were fortunate ])
12. Peashooters
13. Howdy Doody
14. 45 RPM records or even 78 RPM records and no record changer
15. S & H green stamps
16. Hi-fi's
17. Metal ice trays with lever
18. Mimeograph paper and smelling it to "get high."
19. Blue flashbulb
20. Packard's
21. Roller skate keys
22. Cork popguns
23. Drive-ins
24. Studebakers
25. Wash tub wringers, and hanging the clothes outside to dry (and freeze in the winter)

If you remembered 0-5, You're still young
If you remembered 6-10, You're getting older
If you remembered 11-15, Don't tell your age,
If you remembered 16-25, You’re older than dirt!

How about picking up the phone and hearing the operator say "Number please?" How about box cameras, walking to school regardless of the weather, or being more afraid of going home if you were sent to the principal's office. --- It was the great depression, yet life was simpler then.
I might be older than dirt but those memories are some of the best parts of my life.

Coming real soon -- **Spring** -- is just weeks away
Lavern fields of France
February Gardening Calendar

Ornamentals

- Weeks 1-4: Winter aconite (Eranthis sp.) and snowdrops (Galanthus sp.) are hardy bulbs for shady gardens that frequently push up through snow to bloom now.
- Weeks 1-4: Water evergreens if the soil is dry and unfrozen.
- Weeks 1-4: Inspect summer bulbs in storage to be sure none are drying out. Discard any that show signs of rot.
- Weeks 1-4: Enjoy the fragrant blooms of the Ozark Witch Hazel flowering in shrub borders or wooded areas on warm sunny days.
- Weeks 1-4: Take geranium cuttings now. Keep the foliage dry to avoid leaf and stem diseases.
- Weeks 2-4: Sow seeds of larkspur, sweet peas, Shirley poppies and snapdragons where they are to grow outdoors now. To bloom best, these plants must sprout and begin growth well before warm weather arrives.
- Weeks 2-3: Seeds of slow-growing annuals like ageratum, verbena, petunias, geraniums, coleus, impatiens and salvia may be started indoors now.
- Weeks 4: Dormant sprays can be applied to ornamental trees and shrubs now. Do this on a mild day while temperatures are above freezing.
- Weeks 4: Start tuberous begonias indoors now. “Non-stop” varieties perform well in this climate.

Vegetables

- Week 1-4: Season extending devices such as cold frames, hot beds, cloches and floating row covers will allow for an early start to the growing season.
- Week 1-4: Start onion seeds indoors now.
- Week 1-4: Run a germination test on seeds stored from previous years to see if they will still sprout.
- Week 1-4: Don’t work garden soils if they are wet. Squeeze a handful of soil. It should form a ball that will crumble easily. If it is sticky, allow the soil to dry further before tilling or spading.
- Week 2-4: Sow celery and celeriac seeds indoors now.
- Week 3-4: Sow seeds of broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and cabbage indoors now for transplanting into the garden later this spring.
- Week 3-4: If soil conditions allow, take a chance sowing peas, lettuce, spinach and radish. If the weather obliges, you will be rewarded with extra early harvests.

Fruits

- Week 1-4: Inspect fruit trees for tent caterpillar egg masses. Eggs appear as dark brown or gray collars that encircle small twigs. Destroy by pruning or scratching off with your thumbnail.
- Week 1-2: Collect scion wood now for grafting of fruit trees later in spring. Wrap bundled scions with plastic and store them in the refrigerator.
- Week 3-4: Grapes and bramble fruits may be pruned now.
- Week 3-4: Begin pruning fruit trees. Start with apples and pears first. Peaches and nectarines should be pruned just before they bloom.
- Week 3-4: When pruning diseased branches, sterilize tools with a one part bleach, nine parts water solution in between cuts. Dry your tools at day’s end and rub them lightly with oil to prevent rusting.
- Week 4: Established fruit trees can be fertilized once frost leaves the ground. Use about one-half pound of 12-12-12 per tree, per year of age, up to a maximum of 10 pounds fertilizer per tree. Broadcast fertilizers over the root zone staying at least one foot from the tree trunk.
Weeks 1-4: To avoid injury to lawns, keep foot traffic to a minimum when soils are wet or frozen.

Weeks 1-4: When sowing seeds indoors, be sure to use sterile soil mediums to prevent diseases. As soon as seeds sprout, provide ample light to encourage stocky growth.

Weeks 1-4: Repot any root-bound house plants now before vigorous growth occurs. Choose a new container that is only 1 or 2 inches larger in diameter than the old pot.

Weeks 1-4: To extend the vase life of cut flowers you should: 1. - Recut stems underwater with a sharp knife. 2. - Remove any stem foliage that would be underwater. 3. - Use a commercial flower preservative. 4. - Display flowers in a cool spot, away from direct sunlight.

Weeks 1-2: Now is a good time to learn to identify trees by their winter twigs and buds.

Weeks 1-2: Branches of pussy willow, quince, crabapple, forsythia, pear and flowering cherry may be forced indoors. Place cut stems in a vase of water and change the water every 4 days.

Weeks 2-4: Watch for squirrels feeding on the tender, swollen buds of Elms, Hickories, Oaks and other trees as spring approaches.

Weeks 2-4: Maple sugaring time is here! Freezing nights and mild days make the sap flow.

Weeks 2-4: Begin to fertilize house plants as they show signs of new growth. Plants that are still resting should receive no fertilizers yet.

Weeks 3-4: Now is a good time to apply appropriate sprays for the control of lawn weeds such as chickweed and dandelion.

Weeks 3-4: Tall and leggy house plants such as dracaena, dieffenbachia and rubber plants may be air layered now.

Weeks 3-4: Save grape vine prunings for making into attractive wreaths and other craft objects.

Weeks 4: Late winter storms often bury birds’ natural food supplies and a well stocked feeding station will provide a life-giving haven for our feathered friends.

Weeks 4: Encourage birds to nest in your yard by providing water and by putting up bird houses. Planting suitable shrubs, trees, vines and evergreens will provide wild food sources and nesting habitat.

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**Tomato Reisetomate**

This tomato is like a big bunch of cherry tomatoes all fused together, and amazing trait that has everyone asking questions about the alien – looking, bumpy tomatoes. It has also been called “Traveler Tomato”. This tomato has its roots in Central America where the native people would carry it on trips, and eat as they walk. It became best known for its ability to be able to tear it apart a piece at a time with no knife needed. This bright red tomato taste-well rather sour, strong and acid. It is the perfect tomato for those who love raw lemons. It is idea for salads and grilling. You can find this tomato in the Baker Creek heirloom seeds 2003 catalog. Him
Preparing for New Planting Season

First, you have had some beautiful weather to have given your garden that final tilling prior to spring planting. If you have not done so yet you still have time according to the weatherman as we do have a few more days of real pretty weather. And it would not hurt to till in some new fertilizer and or manure, whichever would be your choice. Now that you have your ground laid by and ready for spring planting let us talk about repairing our equipment for starting seeds.

Secondly, you should have stored your seeds in a very good cool place, preferably, in your refrigerator. Most of the seeds that you plan on using have had an adequate dormancy period and should be ready for planting in the next couple weeks.

Third, check out all your equipment. Do your grow lights work well, do you need new grow bulbs, have you got your area situated where your flats can be interrupted. It is not going to be too soon before our local gardening centers have new trays and planting containers and the necessary soils that you will want to use. Another is some of us that are a bit tight or cheap and will attempt to use last year’s trays. So in order to do that you should sterilize your trays as there may be many microorganisms. So here is what you do. You can soak them in a bucket of 10% solution of laundry bleach, and that also includes your plastic flower pots. Anything that you may want to reuse this coming year that is plastic in nature or clay you can dip your containers for about 3 min. in the boiling water. Those are two of the easiest ways to get your trays, pots, and new tools ready for the new season. Now if you want to use some of last year soil I would strongly recommend that you set your oven to 135° to kill off most plant pathogenic bacteria as well as worms, slugs, and centipedes. At 150° you will kill soil insects, at 160° to 180° you will kill viruses and surely be read of most weed seeds and disease microorganisms. All of this is predicated on your soil being placed on a large sheet, couple of inches deep and cooked for 30 to 45 min. Now you are ready to sow or plant your seed flats according to the instruction on the seed packets. I cannot stress the importance of following those instructions, there have been many years of research have gone in to making that information accurate. One of the things I will do occasionally to make sure that my seed are still good is I will run a test on the three or four of the seeds by taking a strip of toilet paper wetting it, placing my seeds in a single row, folding the paper over, keeping it in a light place and moist and allowing it the number of days stated on package to begin sprouting.
That’s something you can do now as you are just weeks away from starting to grow your plants. A few other things I like to be mindful of at this time when I plant or sow my seeds in the flat. One, I will have the soil already damp, plant the seeds that the appropriate depth, cover them with the plastic lid that comes with tray or with Saran wrap, then make sure I have the proper setting of the lights above them and wait for them sprout. Once they sprout removes the cover, make sure they have adequate moisture by misting or other means, and do be careful not to get them to wet as these young tender plants will rot if there feet get to wet.

What I have shared with you has been extremely elementary but sometimes it’s good for us to go back to the very beginning basics to ensure that we get the best plants possible. Two things I would suggest to you, one is if you have special seeds you would like to share bring them to our meeting, two, after your plants have matured to the point of setting out if you have more than you care to have you can share them with fellow members or donate them to our plant sale in the spring.

It sure is good to be talking about planting, digging, and gardening again. May we all have a great spring and a bountiful crop.

This Month’s Recipe

**Creamy Potato Soup**

Our cool days make this month’s recipe extremely appealing. What is more tasty than a hot bowl of potato soup on a cold winter evening. Yes it’s still winter. 46 days till spring

¼ cup butter
½ cup yellow onion, chopped
1 garlic clove, minced
¼ cup flour
3 chicken bouillon cubes
3 cups water or chicken bouillon
1 24 ounce package frozen steam – and – mashed potatoes
2 cups milk
½ teaspoon pepper
bacon, cooked and crumbled, cheddar cheese, shredded.

Melt butter in a large pot over medium heat; add onions and garlic and cook until golden. Sprinkle onion mixture with flour; stir until coated. Stir in bully on cubes and water. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring often. Reduce heat to medium – low and simmer, stirring occasionally, 10 minutes. Microwave potatoes according to package directions omitting butter or milk. Stir potatoes, milk and pepper and two onion mixture. Cook over medium heat about 10 minutes or until thickened. Serve with desired toppings.
This month’s we feature Burpee’s Back Page from 1933 – As Spring is just weeks away we will all be giving thought to starting our tomatoes – And this tomato is around. Great tomatoes do last.
Carrots, Eggs, or Coffee; "Which are you?"

A young woman went to her grandmother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up. She was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed as one problem was solved a new one arose.

Her grandmother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water. In the first, she placed carrots, in the second she placed eggs and the last she placed ground coffee beans. She let them sit and boil without saying a word.

In about twenty minutes she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl. Turning to her granddaughter, she asked, "Tell me what do you see?"

"Carrots, eggs, and coffee," she replied.

She brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they got soft. She then asked her to take an egg and break it.

After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg.

Finally, she asked her to sip the coffee. The granddaughter smiled, as she tasted its rich aroma. The granddaughter then asked. "What's the point, grandmother?"

Her grandmother explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity--boiling water--but each reacted differently.
The carrot went in strong, hard and unrelenting. However after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior. But, after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened.

The ground coffee beans were unique, however. After they were in the boiling water they had changed the water.

"Which are you?" she asked her granddaughter.

"When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?"

Think of this: Which am I?

Am I the carrot that seems strong, but with pain and adversity, do I wilt and become soft and lose my strength?

Am I the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Did I have a fluid spirit, but after a death, a breakup, a financial hardship or some other trial, have I become hardened and stiff?

Does my shell look the same, but on the inside am I bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and a hardened heart?

Or am I like the coffee bean? The bean actually changes the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavor. If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst, you get better and change the situation around you.

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**Up Coming Area Meetings of Interest**

Cole County Extension Center, Central MO Master Gardeners and Lincoln University is hosting the 3rd Annual Spring Gardening Seminar. It will take place at LU’s Carver Farm on Saturday, February 23. Registration is required and typically fills quickly. For more information, please visit: [http://extension.missouri.edu/cole/documents/upcoming%20events/2012_sgs.pdf](http://extension.missouri.edu/cole/documents/upcoming%20events/2012_sgs.pdf)

Completed registration forms and a check or money order needs to be mailed to Cole County Extension Center by February 15. If the seminar is full, forms will be mailed back to students with payment.

**Advanced Training: Pruning Mature Blueberry Plants**

Blueberries produce fruit on branches that were produced the previous year. For the first two or three years of a blueberry’s life it’s not necessary to prune it much, apart from keeping the plant tidy. After this, blueberries need regular pruning to maintain plant vigor and high quality berry production. Interested? This one will be during the day on **Wednesday, February 6th, 2013 from 1-4 p.m.** Space is very limited. In order to attend, you MUST [register here](#) or emailing greene@extension.missouri.edu with your name and phone number.

**Kick Off the 2013 Gardening Year with “Dig In”**

A Gardening Seminar will be held on February 23, 2013 at the University of Missouri Extension Center of St. Charles County from 9:00 to 12:30. Three sessions will be offered with four topics available each session. Registrants should choose a topic for each session for a total of three hours of instruction. The cost for this event is $20 (nonrefundable) for registration received by February 11; $25 for at-the-door registration—class availability may be limited. Detailed information is available by clicking on the following website [http: extension.missouri.edu/stcharles/digin.aspx](http://extension.missouri.edu/stcharles/digin.aspx) or you may call 636-970-3000. Visa, Master Card or Discover accepted
This month’s program is being presented by Mr. Rand Swanigan of MoDOT

Rand has been very active in the work of week eradication in cooperation with the Department of Conservation, Dept. of Agriculture, and Tourism. He will explain how these little buggers got here, how we are fighting them, and what the long term effect is on our crops, pastures, and roadsides.
When a “Cactus” is not a Cactus!

The camellias in the Linnaean House are just starting to bloom and will be in full-flower in February (continuing into early April) but right now is a great time to explore the wonderful world of cacti and succulents on display there now as seen in the photo. Of course there are cacti on display but a great many succulents are not true cacti but members of several other plant families. These plants have many features that make them look like cacti, namely, swollen stems and spines or thorns but their origins, ancestors and close relatives are quite different from cacti.

You will find many succulent plants in the euphobia family (related to the holiday poinsettia). Many of these have a milky sap, which can help distinguish them from true cacti. Others belong to plant families that are common such as the crassula (jade plant) and agave families, but others belong to families that gardeners may not be as familiar. When viewing the succulents take note of the family a plant is in. Many may surprise you.

Cacti and succulents make wonderful, undemanding indoor plants for gardeners who are blessed with a south or west window with good light. If you haven’t tried growing some, why not give some a try? In addition to good light they like a well-drained soil. During the winter they require less water and little or no fertilizer while they rest. When spring comes and the plants begin growing again, increase watering and fertilize about once a month. Allow the soil to dry some between waterings to discourage root rots, the major demise of cacti and succulents. They do have a few insect pests.

Many gardeners get hooked on growing these easy to care for plants that come in so many colorful, fun and even bizarre forms. On your next visit to the Missouri Botanical Garden be sure and stop to marvel at our wonderful examples of cacti and succulents from the world’s arid and desert areas.

We can help answer your questions about growing succulents. By phone, call the Horticulture Answer Service (M-F from 9-Noon @ 314-577-5143) or visit the “doctors” at the Plant Doctor Desk (Monday-Saturday from 10-3.) in the Center for Home Gardening.