



Fruit trees

The coming of cooler weather means more than pulling out old tomato plants and deciding which leafy greens and root vegetables should take their place in the raised bed. This is also the time for those who have fruit trees to begin planning for their winter care. We are also approaching the time to plant fruit trees.

Many gardens with some extra space can fit in a small tree or shrub that will produce flavorful fruit. The amount and quality of that fruit depends on several factors: the variety chosen, the soil and fertility, irrigation, pest management and maintenance.

Some trees are better choices for desert conditions. Something that thrives in Washington State, or even northern Nevada, might have a difficult time in the south's hot, dry environment. One example of a poor choice is cherry. These succulent morsels need a cool winter; in fact there are varieties that require more than 800 hours below 45° to produce spring flowers and fruits). Southern Nevada winters are not cool enough for long enough. In addition, high temperatures and low humidity can cause pollen to dry out, making it unable to pollinate. Both of these environmental conditions can impede fruit production drastically. Some trees, however, find our winters too cold. Avocado and most citrus trees cannot survive the cold we often experience during January or February.

Grape Leaf Skeletonizers



These are extremes; far more fruits thrive in the Mojave area. Quite a few are related, such as peaches, apricots, almonds, pluots and nectarines, among others. These produce a good crop of tasty fruits, even under desert conditions. Depending on the variety, the fruit may appear in early, middle or late spring.

A number of apple cultivars will produce in this climate, although some are more flavorful than others. 'Pink Lady' and 'Golden Dorsett' are able to grow well here and are delicious.

Figs and pomegranates seem to love growing in the desert. The biggest concern, besides insects that might become pestilential (leaf footed bugs, for instance), is that these trees can become very large unless they are kept pruned to an accessible size.

All fruit does not appear on trees. Grapes are very easy to grow. Although the fruit may not be as large as that which comes from a grocery store, they are full of sweetness and flavor. Their biggest enemies are grape leaf skeletonizers, which are the colorful, hungry caterpillars of the skeletonizer moth. These larvae can easily defoliate a vine, leaving only the veins of the leaves, hence the name. They appear in groups, marching in columns as they feed on tender green tissue. Fortunately, these can be controlled using *Bacillus thuringiensis* (B.t.).

Some berry cultivars will grow in the desert. Most growers and researchers recommend the varieties 'Rosborough' and 'Womack'. Surprisingly, these appear to tolerate local conditions better than some others, particularly those that have Native American names, like 'Najavo' and 'Apache'.

Fruit trees, vines and shrubs are labor intensive around planting and pruning, but will provide delicious fruits for years to come.

Dr. Angela O'Callaghan is the Social Horticulture Specialist for University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. Contact ocallaghana@unce.unr.edu or 702-257-5581.