

Plant a tropical fruit tree

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A long lasting fruit tree starts with purchasing a healthy one. Look for the following items: a strong healthy tree with good color, not root bound, free of insects and diseases, and has a single trunk. Many varieties of tropical and subtropical fruits will grow here. Do your research and learn the mature size of the tree and its particular cultural requirements. Look for disease-resistant varieties. Consider whether the tree drops fruit. (Don't put it near the pool!) Some fruit trees can be pruned to a small size for small yards. For easy harvesting, keep the tree no taller than you can reach. Many small trees can be grown in large containers.

When purchasing a tropical fruit tree for your yard there are environmental factors to consider. In the Keys, the main factors to consider are sun, water, salt, and wind.

Tropical fruit trees need to be grown in full sun. That means six to eight hours of sun daily. By providing the tree with plenty of sunlight, there will be better fruit production and tree growth. Allow space between trees for air to circulate.

Watering schedule (irrigation or rainwater) for newly planted trees is daily during the first week, every other day during the second week, third week water every third day, and fourth to eighth week water once a week. After the eighth week, apply 1 inch of water weekly during the warm season and 1 inch every two weeks during the cooler months. The best time of year to plant is now, during the rainy months.

Salt intrusion and spray can damage most tropical fruit trees. Therefore it is best to plant trees away from areas that experience saltwater intrusion or storm surge. Plant fruit trees on the highest part of your property or consider mounding the soil to raise the tree. When a tree has received salt spray on the leaves wash off the leaf surface.

Many fruit trees are not wind tolerant. If you live in a windy area, plant your trees behind a barrier of some type.

Initial fertilization can begin a month after planting. Use a slow release 8-3-9 or 8-2-10 formula that contains 2% to 4% magnesium plus manganese and iron. Fruit trees need to be sprayed with a micronutrient spray four times a year. Also, drench roots with liquid chelated iron twice a year.