

Tropical Fruit Tree Site Selection and Planting Information

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In the Florida Keys, a wide variety of tropical fruit trees can be grown. To ensure that your fruit tree will survive and bear fruit, make sure that you purchase healthy fruit trees, select an appropriate planting site, plant properly, and provide long-term care.

Initially, observe what fruit trees are growing in your neighborhood. This will give you an idea of what tropical fruit trees to plant on your property.

Purchasing healthy fruit trees

When purchasing a tree, it is important to buy a vigorous growing tree. Things to look for are a single trunk that is healthy in color and is free of insects and diseases. The tree should not be root-bound, meaning that the roots are encircling within the pot and growing out the bottom holes. Make sure it has a well-developed root system that has rooted throughout the soil.

Site Selection Recommendations

- Fruit trees need to be planted in an area that receives 6 to 8 hours of sunlight daily for greater fruit production and stronger tree growth.
- Tropical fruit trees don't like to get their roots wet or salty. Select areas that are not low-lying, too close to salt water or salt spray, and do not experience storm surge.
- Plant large trees 30 feet away from buildings and other trees, medium trees 20 feet, and small trees 10 feet away.

Planting Methods

In the Keys, there are two tree planting methods: planting on a mound or planting at ground level. Fruit trees are planted on mounds where there is a high water table, the possibility of salt intrusion into the root zone, or periodic flooding of the planting area. Planting mounds need to be 1-3 feet high and 3 – 10 feet in diameter, constructed of a mixture of native soil and sand. For fruit

trees planted at ground level, prepare an "X"-shaped trench, place the fruit tree in the center of the "X" and set slightly higher (3 to 6 inches) than the surrounding ground with soil gently sloping away. Backfill the planting hole with a mix of 60% screened native soil (remove large rocks) and 40% soil amendments (such as, topsoil, muck, compost).

Long-Term Care

For the long term care of your tropical fruit tree, mulch the surface ground area around the root system, water on a regular basis, fertilize as needed and keep an eye out for insect and disease problems. Citrus trees should not be mulched.

After planting, mulch around the base of the tree. Place the mulch 4 to 6 inches from the tree trunk to lessen the introduction of crown rot. Keep the mulch depth at about 2 to 3 inches out to the edge of the dripline (end of the branches) and replenish mulch as the original mulch decomposes.

Watering your tree is essential for establishment and fruit production. The general rule of thumb for establishment is 1½ gallons of water per each inch of trunk diameter. Water early in the morning, if it has not rained. Water the soil, not the leaves.

Water schedule for establishment:

- During week one: water once a day
- During second week: water every other day
- During the third week: water every third day
- The fourth to eighth week: water once a week
- After the eighth week: apply 1" of water per week in the morning if it has not rained, especially during the warm months
- After the first year: during the cool months, apply 1" of water every 10-14 days and apply 1" of water a week during the warm season if it has not rained.

To maintain a healthy fruit tree, begin fertilizing your tree after it has been in the ground four to six weeks. Apply 1/4 cup of granular fertilizer out to the dripline of the tree. The fertilizer formulation may be an 8-3-9, 8-2-10, or similar material that contains 2 - 4% magnesium and other minor elements of manganese and iron. After the initial fertilization, continue fertilizing on a monthly basis for the first year. Apply minor element spray in March, May, July, and September. Apply chelated iron drench in May and September. As the tree grows in size, you will use more fertilizer.