

Backyard Fruit

Lee Borden

Raise your hand . . .

- Like the taste of fruit year round?
- Want to save money?

Then I have a suggestion for you . . .



So why would you want to grow fruit?

- Fruit you grow really does taste better
- You can grow varieties not available in the store
- You can't beat the freshness
- Leave a legacy
- It's fun!

Threshold requirements

- Full sun
- Decent soil
- Patience
- Lots of patience

Nice to have

- South facing slope
- Good air drainage
- Lots of water in season
- The right pH in your soil

When to plant fruit trees?

- Not now
- Trees need to be dormant
- Ideal is December through mid-February
- Time for roots to develop

Let's look at several fruits . . .

. . . in descending order of how easy they are to grow in central Alabama

Fruit choices

- Blueberries
- Muscadines
- Strawberries
- Persimmons
- Pears
- Figs
- Apples

Notice what has not shown up yet . . .

- Peaches
- Blackberries (at least cultivated blackberries)
- Plums
- Pomegranates
- Melons
- Kiwifruit
- Raspberries
- Bunch grapes
- Cherries
- Citrus
- What have we forgotten to mention?

Does that mean you can't grow cherries?

- You can do it
- Work harder
- Higher chance of failure
- More years of no harvest
- More vulnerable to pests and disease
- More vulnerable to summer heat

Blueberries

- Need at least two cultivars
- Prefer acid soil (down around 4.5 to 5.5)
- Need well-drained soil
- Love water while they're setting fruit
- You should see first fruit within two years

Plant December and January

- Dig a hole about as deep as the pot is tall
- Twice as wide
- Water well
- Mix 25% native soil, 25% pine bark, 50% rich topsoil
- Why pine bark?
- Not too deep!
- Mulch around the base but keep mulch off the plant itself
- Pine straw is ideal mulch
- Video: <http://bit.ly/1uVDmuQ>

Muscadines

- Need a trellis and more or less annual pruning
- Otherwise, easy as it gets
- But you do need to be patient
- Let's talk terminology
- Plant just like a blueberry, but no pine bark
- So that means how?

Strawberries

- Plant in October, harvest in the spring
- They overwinter just fine
- But protect buds and fruit from a late frost
- Strawberries are always our first fruit of the season
- Spring planting produces smaller fruit
- We let them grow at least one more season – mothers and daughters
- Moist spring is not your friend

How's our time running?

Persimmons

- These are not the persimmons your friends fed you as a kid
- Who remembers?
- Asian persimmons
- Larger, and delicious even while firm
- Who has tasted an Asian persimmon?
- Plant it and wait three years
- Bear lots of fruit as they mature, and it's heavy
- Caveat: We've lost two of the six we planted, and a third is looking puny

Pears

- Often vulnerable to a spring frost
- When they're good, they're very very good
- Beware of fertilizer!
- Careful not to over-prune – every 2-3 years is plenty

Figs

- Love a sunny spot on the south side of a building
- But figs can get huge!
- Young trees bad about freezing back to the ground
- We got clobbered March 16
- You either love 'em or you don't
- Old trees can be pruned without mercy during the winter

Apples

- Be aware of chilling hours: <http://bit.ly/1ss46eZ>
- Apples typically need more, so look for low required chilling hours (800 or less)
- Apples wait longer than pears to bud in the spring
- Less vulnerable to a late season frost

Stretching out your season

- Depending on what you enjoy . . .
- Fresh fruit from March well into November



What about pests?

- We have a running dialogue
- Stinkbugs
- Leaf-footed bugs
- Plum Curculio
- Spotted wing drosophila
- Your best weapon against pests: diversity
- Keep the little buggers guessing!

Do we have
time for questions?

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These slides: <http://bit.ly/ollifruit2015>

Publications from Alabama Cooperative Extension System:

Fruit Culture in Alabama – ANR-53-A through ANR-53-R

Home Gardening: Rabbiteye Blueberries – ANR-1078

Commercial Muscadine & Bunch Grape Production Guide – ANR-0774

Rabbiteye Blueberries – ANR-1078

ACES, "Selecting Muscadine Grape Cultivars for Your Vineyard"

Alabama Strawberries – ANR-HE-0715

Our web site: <http://longleafbreeze.com>