

Gardening & Backyard Fruit Trees

Are you concerned about the economy, food prices, food safety and your health? Consider joining the Bibb County Farmer's Market Committee, which is trying to establish a Market in Bibb County this year. We need growers, planners, organizers, sponsors, partners, volunteers and all kinds of help. Call 205-926-3117 to learn how you can help address the above concerns while stimulating our local economy.

If you want to garden and become more self-sufficient with respect to your food supply, consider planting a vegetable garden or backyard fruit trees. Bibb County is an ideal place for both. Extension will host a workshop on backyard fruit trees Monday, March 2, 3-5pm at the Rock Building in Centreville. Call 205-926-3117 to reserve your spot.

As prelude to this program, Extension's Tony Glover has some excellent advice: Gardening is a great hobby and winter is a great time to start planning and planting. Fruit plants can be planted almost anytime, but the dormant season is ideal for most---anytime during the winter that the ground is not frozen.

Winter is also a good time to amend the soil and make needed corrections. Start off right by having the soil tested for nutrient needs and to determine the pH. The pH is a measure of the soil's acidity or alkalinity, which is very important to know so that you can make needed adjustments several weeks or even months prior to planting.

Before soil testing, determine where the plants will be located. The most important considerations in making this determination are sunlight availability and soil drainage. Generally, you should find areas that get a minimum of 6 hours of direct light during the summer months. Almost as important as sunlight is finding soil that is very well drained. This may involve adding good topsoil, compost or other amendments to improve the drainage, or even building a raised bed or using a container with all new soil.

Several fruit crops can be successfully grown in our area but I would suggest you start with some of the easier crops. These include blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, figs, oriental persimmons and possibly even muscadine grapes. Spend a little time researching which varieties of fruit to grow.

Vegetables are easier to manage when grown in small beds, raised gardens, or even containers that can be relocated to take advantage of the sun's movement. It is a good idea to have a rotation plan for your vegetables because disease and other pest problems will build up in the soil over time.

Most vegetables can be grown in containers. The primary keys to successfully growing vegetables in containers are to put them in the proper size container and keep them well watered and fertilized. Vegetables are mostly water, so keep the soil moist but not waterlogged to insure good nutrient and water uptake within the plant. If you grow in containers instead of rotating plants in beds, just replace the soil at least every couple years with fresh soil. The old soil can be used as mulch around your ornamental or fruit plantings without fear of spreading disease.

Some plants can even be grown in hanging baskets if enough light is available. Try growing an everbearing variety of strawberries or a grape tomato. Herbs make great container or hanging garden plants because they love the well drained soil and they are

a little more drought tolerant than some of the veggies. Visit our website at www.aces.edu and search the publications area, or call us for more information.

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