

Scott's Guide To Easy Tree Fruits for Baltimore

Presented by the Baltimore Orchard Project | 2012 Edition

Scott Smith lives on 1 acre in Baltimore MD where he tends to his 250 fruit trees. The Baltimore Orchard Project thanks Scott for generously sharing his knowledge with us.

Here is a list of the fruits most likely to succeed in the environs of Baltimore, based on Scott's experience. They are listed in estimated order of the best chance for success.

Asian Persimmon

Although somewhat vulnerable the first few years, once established these trees are very reliable. Squirrels and birds generally leave them alone but deer like the fruits.

Varieties

Fuyu types are generally the easiest and most-liked (Fuyu, Hana Fuyu, Jiro, Twentieth Century, etc). If you are planting several types, you may also like to try an astringent variety such as Saijo and Giombo. They are softer and need to be ripened on the counter after picking or will pucker your lips. The reason why it is worth this extra work is they taste better.

Fig

Figs can die back in cold winters but will grow back from the roots. The last few winters have been so warm there has been no dieback. Make sure the variety has a closed eye or ants will get in. Wasps and birds will eat the fruits, and sometimes squirrels take a liking to them. Figs often split in the rain. They ripen over a long period so provide many weeks of fresh eating. They need to be eaten or processed soon after picking, though, as they spoil quickly.

Varieties

Celeste, Hardy Chicago, Green Ischia.

Pomegranate

Although not yet common here, pomegranate bushes are very easy to grow in our climate as long as you get an extremely hardy variety. Most varieties being sold are not hardy, only the new Russian varieties are hardy enough. The hardy varieties have only become readily available in the last few years so few nurseries are selling them and very few people are growing them. Some problems may emerge as more people grow them but they seem pretty carefree based on the limited current knowledge.

Varieties

Kazake, Salavatski. Sources: Rolling River Nursery (California), Edible Landscaping (Virginia - get their "Russian Hardy" variety), Just Fruits and Exotics (Florida - get their Russian #8).

Mulberry

Improved varieties are much more tasty than the wild ones that are common. The trees can get very tall. You will need to protect young plants against deer. Squirrels love these so you may not get any fruits until your tree is large.

Varieties

Illinois Everbearing, Kokuso.

Jujube

Jujubes are often called Chinese dates because they can be dried and eaten like dates. They are also excellent fresh, with a crunchy texture like an apple and tasting something like a cross between an apple and a date. The trees are self-pollinating and generally are easy to grow. The fruits may crack late in the season and ants will burrow into some of the fruits, but the birds and squirrels don't seem that interested in them.

Varieties

The best fresh-eating variety is called Honey Jar, it is very tasty but small. Few nurseries sell it unfortunately. Li is the most common fresh-eating variety and is also good, as is Sugar Cane. GA866 is another good variety but it can take a long time to begin production. Most other varieties are meant for drying only, and don't taste nearly as good as the aforementioned varieties. Most of the original jujubes in the US were grown from seeds of dried fruits brought back from China and only recently have the fresh-eating varieties from China started to show up in US nurseries. The jujube has been under-appreciated in the US for many years because the better varieties were not available, and the lesser varieties have a texture of a sponge or cardboard, not very appealing! Sources: Burnt Ridge, Raintree, Just Fruits and Exotics, Edible Landscaping.

Bush Cherry

These are similar to sour cherries but with few pest problems. They are large bushes when full-grown. I have not grown them myself but I know of others growing them successfully who are happy with the fruits. Generally they are sold as seedlings and any two should be able to pollinate each other. Nanking cherry (*Prunus tomentosa*) is the standard bush cherry. There is also a new variety called Carmine Jewel which has larger fruits; it is only sold by Henry Fields/Gurneys. The Cornelian cherry is a somewhat larger tree, it is not as tasty but is easy to care for and good for cooking.

Chestnut

They are very large trees which are easy to grow. I have no experience myself since I don't have the room. Chestnut blight killed off most American chestnuts so people don't remember how good a crop they can be. Make sure to get Chinese or Chinese-American crosses which are resistant to chestnut blight. Two varieties are needed for pollination; many chestnuts are sold as seedlings so any two seedlings will work. Sources include [Edible Landscaping](#) (Virginia), [Raintree](#) (Washington), [Burnt Ridge](#) (Washington), [One Green World](#) (Oregon) (some of these nurseries sell non-blight-resistant varieties so be careful when ordering).

Hazelnut / Filbert

These large bushes are easy to grow but it is lower down on this list primarily due to the difficulty of keeping the squirrels from eating all the nuts. You must grow only Eastern Filbert Blight immune varieties, otherwise your trees will die in a few years from this incurable disease. Most of the EFB-immune trees are sold by west coast nurseries. Two varieties are needed for pollination.

Varieties

Yamhill, Jefferson, Santiam, Theta, other blight-immune varieties. Sources: Raintree, Burnt Ridge, One Green World, Edible Landscaping.

Asian Pear

While asian pears can often be grown without spraying, there are several maladies that can cause problems that may require spraying. That is why pears are lower down on this list. Stinkbugs are very fond of the fruits and can wreck the whole crop. If your tree is not large you can manage the stinkbugs by knocking the ones you find into a jar of soapy water. Their numbers are never large enough so it is possible to make a dent in them with this simple approach if repeated several times a week in peak infestation periods. Common maladies to be on the lookout for include fireblight, pear psylla, and pear leaf blister mite. Also moths can infest asian pears, if you get moths there is not much you can do but cut out the worms when you eat the fruit. Two varieties are needed for pollination.

Varieties

Kosui, Shin-Li, Tennesui, Shinsui, Chojuro, Twentieth Century (Korean Giant), etc.

European Pear

Similar to Asians but somewhat less problems from stinkbugs, however they take longer to fruit and are harder to pick since they are picked green and most varieties need subsequent ripening under refrigeration. They can take ten years before they start fruiting, so quince rootstock is recommended to get fruit faster. Two varieties are needed for pollination.

Varieties

Seckel, Blake's Pride, Harrow Sweet, Harrow Delight, Moonglow, Potomac, etc. My favorite pear is an obscure variety called Josephine des Malines, it fruits very reliably and tastes excellent. Sources for pears on quince rootstock: [Tierre Madre Farm](#) (also the only source for Josephine des Mailnes that I know of), [Cummins Nursery](#); not much else unfortunately.

Pawpaw

This is a love it or hate it fruit and that puts it at the bottom of this list. The trees are easy to grow, but many people don't like the taste, which is something like banana custard (with a bitter or tinny overtone in the mouths of the detractors). Deer will eat the fruits. Two are needed for pollination. They can be grown in less than six hours of sun but will accordingly produce less fruit.

Varieties

Overleese, NC-1, Sunflower, Taytoo, Shenandoah, Susquehanna, others (all pawpaws are fairly similar in taste since they have only recently been domesticated; still, I would avoid seedlings and get named varieties only).

General Growing Hints

Here are some of the most important issues. The further reading below expands on many of these points.

- All fruit trees need 6 or more hours of sun a day and should not be planted in a frost pocket (flat area at the bottom of a hill). Guesses of how much sun there is are often inaccurate. You need to check it out. One way is to stand in the proposed planting spot and face south and track the imagined path of the sun across the sky. When planning an orchard layout put the larger trees on the north side to avoid blocking the sun from the smaller trees.
- A bareroot tree is planted by digging a hole big enough to comfortably fit all the roots, and no bigger. Generally nothing should be added to the hole; some people think it is OK to add as much as half compost. Don't add manure or fertilizer to the hole at planting. That's a good way to kill a tree.
- Composted wood mulch should be put around the tree and weeds should be kept from the base of the tree as much as possible for the first 2-3 years. Wood mulch holds water to help the tree through dry spells, and nearby weeds can compete for nutrients and need to be eliminated.
- First-year trees need to be watered when the soil dries out. In Maryland that generally means starting in late May and through September there may be a need for water. Don't over-water, that is almost as bad as under-watering. A good soaking no more than once per week is a good guideline.
- Fertilize young trees every spring by top-dressing with a shovelful of compost and a handful of 5-2-5 or similar fertilizer such as Plant Tone. Top off with a fresh layer of wood mulch out to the edge of the tree canopy.
- You will need to decide if you want to try to keep the trees "pedestrian height" (able to be picked without a ladder) or not; if so you may be doing a lot of pruning. The more vigorous plants such as mulberries can be hard to keep pedestrian height. Pruning in general is a major topic which you can find more about [here](#).
- For spacing, I would recommend 12-15' as a good first approximation for most of the above. Too far apart wastes space and too close will lead to disease and fruiting problems down the road. Bush-trees including pomegranate/bush cherry/filbert need about 8', mulberry needs about 20', and chestnut needs 35'. Note that you can plant two chestnuts in the same hole if you don't have the room for two trees 35' apart.
- Of the above varieties, squirrels will strip mulberries, nuts, and pears. Once the mulberries and chestnuts are big enough you will be able to share with the squirrels due to the sheer number of fruits. The best squirrel protection is to put a baffle around the trunk, similar to baffles used to keep squirrels off bird feeders. When using a baffle you also need to make sure they cannot jump onto your fruit tree from any neighboring tree; they will jump about twice as far as your guess of what they could do. Protecting hazelnuts is a challenge, they are small and squirrels will take all nuts if they are not protected, but they are a bush so a baffle will not work. Netting is probably the most common approach used to protect hazelnuts, but it is a big hassle.

- Birds will eat mulberries, figs and cherries; the cherries may need to be netted to get any fruit. Hanging old CD's in the tree as the fruits ripen may also deter the birds.
- Deer will munch heavily on mulberry and chestnut leaves and will munch on the occasional pear leaf. The others above are only desperation food for deer. Protect any tree the deer may take a liking to with a wire cage until it is above their reach. Deer used to be uncommon in the city but every year they come further into town.

Further Reading

Often a simple web search such as growing chestnuts will pull up a good general guide. Here are a few guides on the different fruits and nuts

<p><u>Asian Persimmon</u>: polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu justfruitsandexotics.com</p> <p><u>Fig</u>: caes.uga.edu (Follow North GA recommendations) justfruitsandexotics.com</p> <p><u>Pomegranate</u>: justfruitsandexotics.com (Ignore varieties section, this guide is for further south) agmrc.org (Again ignore adaptation/varieties)</p> <p><u>Mulberry</u>: justfruitsandexotics.com</p>	<p><u>Jujube</u>: justfruitsandexotics.com ediblelandscaping.com</p> <p><u>Hazelnut / Filbert</u>: extension.umn.edu</p> <p><u>Asian Pear</u>: aces.edu clemson.edu</p> <p><u>European Pear</u>: pubs.ext.vt.edu</p> <p><u>Chestnut</u>: acf.org</p> <p><u>Pawpaw</u>: pawpaw.kysu.edu petersonpawpaws.com</p>
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Recommended Nurseries

<p><u>Edible Landscaping</u> (Virginia - potted trees only, so shipping is expensive)</p> <p><u>Just Fruits and Exotics</u> (Florida)</p>	<p><u>Raintree Nursery</u> (Washington)</p> <p><u>Burnt Ridge Nursery</u> (Washington)</p>	<p><u>Stark Brothers</u> (Missouri)</p> <p><u>Johnson Nursery</u> (Georgia)</p> <p><u>One Green World</u> (Oregon)</p>
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There are no good local sources, all of these are mail-order. The southern and eastern nurseries are often the best choices since their varieties will more likely be appropriate for our climate. Do not order a fig, chestnut, pomegranate, mulberry, persimmon, or pear tree variety from a western nursery unless you know that the variety will do well here. There are several truly horrible nurseries out there and those tend to come up at the top in Google searches so be careful.

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