



Wilson's Nursery



Connie's Corner

Help your customers succeed with their edible efforts!
by Connie Kratzke

- Get folks talking about how they envision their fruit growing experience. This will help you gauge the appropriate scope for their food forest, garden or orchard. Not only is this an opportunity to learn how you can best serve your client, it's a chance to show them you care about their interests. Ask questions like:
 - "Are you interested in food preservation?"
 - "Are you motivated to show your children where their food comes from?"
 - "Are you looking for an engaging hobby that could inspire other hobbies?"
- They may want to go big. Steer them back towards reality. Don't sell an orchard to a family full of kids in traveling sports. Two, semi-dwarf apple trees are plenty for an average family who just wants to pick fresh snacks and bake occasional crisps. Young couple with commitment reservations? Sell them a self-fruitful cherry. Save your dream orchard for those who will truly appreciate it and/or know the drill. Others might curse your name while mashing through rotten fruits.
- Choose trees that are compatible pollinators for each other. Trees should have overlapping bloom times and be of the same genus, without being too closely related. Two fruits of the same variety generally will not pollinate each other. Despite being of the same (*Prunus*) genus, plums generally only pollinate plums and the same is true of cherries and apricots. Peaches, sour cherries and Mount Royal plums are the only trees sold at Wilson's that yield without partners. Companionship typically improves harvests considerably.
- Space the trees a minimum of five feet further than their mature widths, trunk to trunk. If you can go ten, go ten. If you can go twenty, go twenty. Results are best when air flows freely. Pruning, treating, harvesting- really every portion of the fruit growing process goes better when not perpetually being poked in the eyes. Ideally, semi-dwarf trees grown on Malling 7 A rootstocks should be spaced twenty

feet, trunk to trunk.

- Inform people of the timeframe from planting to harvest. Be sure to let them know if the varieties they choose are biennial or slow bearers. Semi-dwarf trees generally take five years to fruit. The trees we start with at Wilson's are a couple of years old, and after a season at our place, often produce. However, since transplant shock can set them back, that five-year time frame is probably good to use.
- Make sure customers know that certain fruits are more prolific than others. Pears bear. Sure, it takes two trees and up to seven years for fruits; but things often progress faster. When you've filled every vessel with over-ripe pears and no one's interested in handouts, you may have regrets. Trees self-thin. Fruit litter attracts things that sting. Deer may invade and destroy. People need to be prepared for the bounty and the situations it will present. Ask the "go big" folks if they have friends with pigs. If not, suggest they make some.
- Pollinators and homeowners benefit from pollinator pathways. Guide the bees and other good-doers towards the crops. This is an upsell opportunity. Get some early-blooming natives in the mix, like Prairie Smokes (*Geum triflorum*) and Goat's Beards (*Aruncus* sp.). Woodland Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*) are good too. Think early. Bloom times should ideally overlap with blossom development.
- Emphasize the importance of good sanitation. Whether growing organically or conventionally, keeping things clean is beneficial. Prune during the dormant season (late winter - early spring). Sterilize cutting tools between cuts if you see anything suspicious. Pick up all fruit litter as soon as possible. Regardless of whether you spray preventatively or utilize traps and barriers, fewer pests means fewer problems.
- Make sure people have a basic understanding of pest control and how various products work. If you sell them broad spectrum insecticides, make sure they know when to apply them and how residual they are. Killing non-target insects will work to their detriment. Be certain clients understand, the product they choose must be labeled for use on food crops. Explain that there are windows and intervals for treatment and they can't just spray whatever, whenever, Harp the mantra, "the label is the law." This shit is important.
- Inform your clients about bad plant combinations. Explain cedar apple rust. Make sure they know that Junipers and Arborvitaes are alternate hosts. Tell them about black walnut allelopathy. If that last statement confuses you, get out the Google.
- Pruning is necessary to produce healthy fruits. While that can be scary for people, here is a fail-proof method that may take the fear away:
 - Always prune in late winter whenever possible. When temperatures are below freezing, nothing evil is active.
 - Start by removing suckers and water sprouts. In other words, remove anything sticking out of the trunk or ground beneath the scaffold branches. Then remove anything coming off a main branch at a 90-degree angle. All perpendiculars must go.
 - Remove all branches that are growing inward towards the trunk. They restrict air flow.
 - Now that you can see the habit the tree is supposed to have, tackle branches that cross and rub. Remove the offender that does not follow the natural growth habit of the tree. In order for the branches to come into contact in this way, one must be breaking the rules.
 - While many people remove dead/diseased/broken branches first, I like to do them last. Novices don't know what they don't know. If any spreadable problem is lurking in the damaged wood, it could be transferred everywhere if it's pruned out first. Cut into healthy tissue at least a few inches beyond presumed infections. When doubt arises, sanitize between cuts with a 1:9 bleach solution, rubbing alcohol or Lysol/Clorox wipes. Personally, I like rubbing alcohol, but it may not kill fire blight. While this may seem like overkill during the dormant season, it's better to be safe than sorry.
 - If you are dealing with fire blight or black knot, you will need to cut four (black knot) to eight (fire blight) inches below the infection to effectively remove it. Branch debris should be burned, buried or disposed of off-site. Be considerate if you choose the last option. Many municipal yard waste sites compost their material and it's debatable whether or not piles heat up enough to kill all inoculum.

I am certain I could go on, but this is a good start. Growing fruits requires time, space and labor. As long as expectations are in line with reality, there are good times to be had. Be real. Crush a delusion or two, but never let them catch you in a lie. People are more willing to re-shape dreams than re-grow trust. Take an active interest. Learn what you don't know. Take advantage of education opportunities and mingle with experienced folks. Doing so will never work to your detriment.

The top picture below best summarizes my fruit growing experience. To protect my grapes each year, I sew a Micro Mesh barrier around our vines. My biggest foes: yellow jackets! They devour all that is sacred and collapse in drunken piles where innocent passersby can step on them. Enough is enough. All we want is a few bottles of wine each year and this is what it takes. Don't even get me started on hard cider!



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Current Summer Hours of Operation:
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***Please email all quote requests and
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