

Selecting Fruit Trees and Vines for California School Gardens

*“Today is the second best day to plant a tree.
The best day to plant a tree was 10 years ago.”*

Planting a fruit tree or vine is an investment in your garden’s future. When selecting a tree for a school garden there are a few basic concepts to understand so that you can make the best choice. Consider consulting a fruit tree expert to discuss the conditions described below.

When will the tree set fruit?

Choose varieties that will make fruit while students are in session. There are many varieties of each type of fruit. Different varieties produce fruit at different times throughout the season.

Select the appropriate tree size for your garden site.

Many trees can be purchased on rootstocks that will help determine the tree’s ultimate height. Dwarfing rootstocks can keep some varieties of fruit trees under 8 feet.

Select appropriate varieties for your climate zone.

Stone fruits (peaches, nectarines, plums, apricots, cherries) can be grown in areas with average annual minimum temperatures below -10°F. Pome fruits (apples, pears, and relatives) can be grown in areas with average annual minimum temperatures below -20°F. Citrus should be grown in warmer areas, where average annual minimum temperature is no lower than 30°F.

Select appropriate varieties for the average chill hours in your region.

Many fruit trees need a specific number of “chilling hours” (temperatures between 32°F - 45°F). Trees that do not receive their proper amount of chill hours during the winter may experience delayed foliation or have problems flowering and forming fruit.

The number of necessary chill hours for fruit trees will vary by variety. For example: an “Anna” Apple has a low chill factor requiring only 200 hours, while the “Gravenstein” Apple needs 700 cumulative chill hours to fruit well. Most of Northern California receives between 800 and 1,500 hours of chill each winter. Southern California may only receive 100-400 hours.

Plant your tree in an area with good drainage.

Shallow, poorly drained sites will produce small, weak plants that have lower yields, more pest problems, and require special water management practices. Notice where water accumulates or puddles in the winter and avoid planting trees in those areas.

Fruit Trees and Vines for California School Gardens

(listed in order of fruiting season)

Fruit Name <small>* These trees require minimal pruning and maintenance expertise.</small>	USDA Zone	Best Time To Plant	Harvest Time Dates may vary by variety	Tree Height Tree height varies by rootstock and pruning	Evergreen or Deciduous
Pear	5-8	Best to plant from bare root tree in winter	Summer - Fall	Dwarf height 8-10 ft, Standard 30ft	D
Apples	5-9	Best to plant from bare root tree in winter	Summer - Fall	Dwarf height 8-12 ft, Semidwarf 12-18 ft Standard 18-22ft	D
Grapes	4-8	Best to plant from bare root tree in winter	Summer - Fall	10-15 ft vine, Grow on trellis or fence	D Vine
Pineapple Guava *	7-10	Fall As container plant, can plant year round	Fall - Winter	4-12 ft	E
Kiwi Fruit	8-10	Fall, can plant year round, need male and female for fruit production	Fall - Winter	15 -25 ft vine, Grow on trellis or fence	D Vine
Almond	7-9	Best to plant from bare root tree in winter	Fall	12-15 ft	D
Walnut	4-9	Best to plant from bare root tree in winter	Fall	20-50 ft	D
Pomegranate *	7-11	Best to plant from bare root tree in winter	Fall - Winter	5-12 ft	semi - D
Persimmon *	7-10	Best to plant from bare root tree in winter	Fall - Winter	12-18 ft	D
Citrus *	8-11	Fall Container plant, can plant year round	Late Fall - Spring depending on variety	6-25 ft , depending on variety	E
Cherries	4-8	Best to plant from bare root tree in winter	Early Spring	10-30 ft	D
Apricot or Aprium	4-8	Best to plant from bare root plant in winter	Late Spring - Summer	12-20 ft	D
Fig *	7-11	Fall Container plant, can plant year round	Spring and Fall, depending on your region	15-30 ft	D
Raspberries *	3-9	Best to plant from bare root tree in winter	Late Spring – Fall, depending on variety	4-6 ft	D
Plum or Pluot	4-8	Best to plant from bare root plant in winter	Late Spring - Summer	15-40 ft	D
Blackberries *	5-8	Best to plant from bare root plant in winter	Summer - Fall	3-6 ft	D