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Growing Tree Fruit in the Uintah Basin

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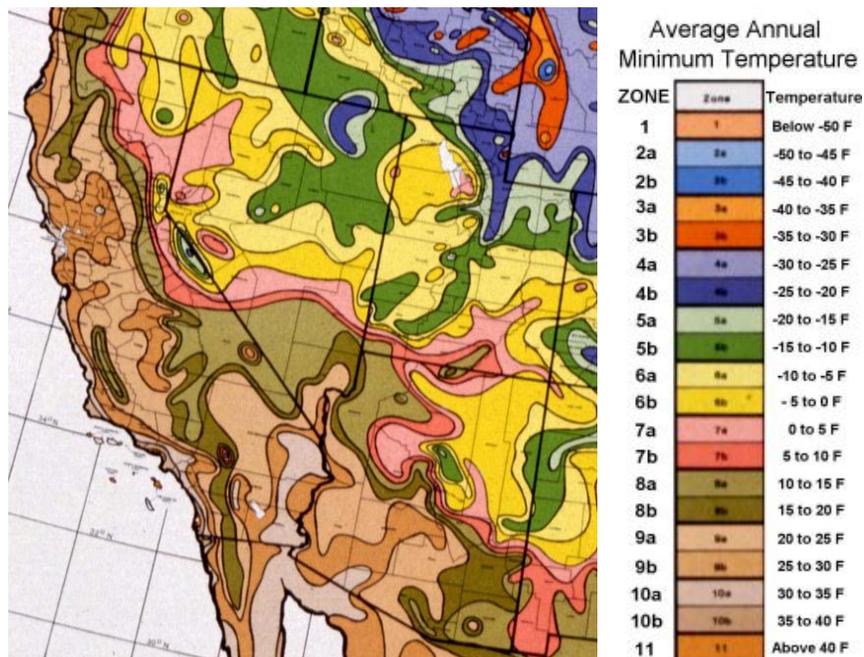
Many people want to grow their own fruit in the Uintah Basin. Three problems limit successful fruit production; cold winters, a short growing season (late spring frosts and early fall frosts), and soils. Most well-drained soils can be managed for fruit production, but the challenges of the climate are best managed by selecting the right species and varieties.

Winters can be cold in the Uintah Basin. Most fruit growing regions have recorded minimum temperatures of -30° to -40° Fahrenheit. The USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map (Figure 1) shows the Uintah Basin to be in Zone 5a or 5b which means that *average* minimum temperatures are between -10° and -20° . However, because temperatures can get colder than -20° , select varieties hardy in Zone 4 to reduce risk of winterkill. Local conditions may modify the micro environment making the growing of Zone 5 fruit possible in protected areas.



Photo by Jim Belliston

Figure 1. USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map of the Southwestern United States



Generally, this means we can have some success growing hardy varieties of apples, apricots, pears, cherries and plums. Although risky, peach and nectarine lovers may want to try hardy varieties of these fruits. Locations with good air drainage – with some slope and elevation above the valley floor – and protection from wind and afternoon sun will be the most successful.

Southwest winter injury can be a problem of fruit trees, especially of newly transplanted trees. It occurs when the bark on the south and west side of a tree warms during the day and then freezes at night. In the spring, a dead patch of sunken bark is apparent on the trunk. Later, this dead or weak tissue may become infected with the cytospora fungus which causes the dead bark to peel away in paper-like sheets. The fungus can girdle and kill the tree if it occurs on the main trunk. This kind of winter injury can be prevented by wrapping the trunk of newly transplanted trees with burlap or other commercial white wrapping materials. The wrap should be kept in place for two years and examined periodically to make sure it is not constricting the growth of the tree. White latex paint can also be used to reflect the heat of the winter sun.

Not all varieties that can be grown successfully in the Uintah Basin are listed below. New varieties become available all the time. Consider this list as a starting point for the home gardener.

Apples

Hardy varieties that bloom in mid to late spring and ripen by late September will be the most successful. Fire blight can be a problem so select resistant varieties if possible. Powdery mildew can be a problem occasionally. Table 1 lists a few varieties to consider. Several different rootstocks are available to control mature tree size. Dwarfing rootstocks also result in trees that bear fruit earlier than standard trees. Dwarf rootstocks (M27, M9 and M26) limit tree size to 8 – 10 ft but have brittle wood and require support. The best semi-dwarf rootstock for the Uintah Basin is M7A. Hardiness and fire blight resistance are partly determined by rootstock and likely play a role in the adaptability of M7A. M111 is another rootstock to consider which will produce trees that reach about 80% the size of standard trees.

Apricots

The apricot is one of the earliest fruits to bloom in the spring, and its blossoms are often killed by frosts. Many trees survive and produce in the Uintah Basin. However, an extremely cold winter may kill trees. Spring frosts will cause inconsistent production. Hardy varieties that bloom late are preferred. Table 2 lists some possibilities. Plant two varieties to insure good pollination.

Pears

Pears are not as winter hardy as apples. Asian pears are less hardy than European pears. Fireblight can be a serious problem. Most varieties require a pollinator. Table 3 lists a few varieties worth trying in the Uintah Basin. Picking pears at the right time with post-harvest ripening is the key to high quality fruit.

Cherries

Tart cherries are very hardy and do well in the Uintah Basin. For tart cherries, Montmorency is the best. Others to consider are Northstar, Early Richmond and Meteor. All common tart cherry varieties are self-fruitful.

Sweet cherries like Bing, Lambert, and Royal Anne may survive as trees but produce fruit only occasionally. The flower buds usually freeze over winter. If buds survive the winter, early frosts generally kill the blossoms.

Plums

European type plums are more hardy than Japanese plums. Stanley, Mt. Royal and XXX French have purple skins that tend to be bitter. Green Gage has the best flavor, but its appearance is less desirable. Alderman would be worth trying as it is a red plum with yellow, sweet and juicy flesh with the additional advantage that the tree is attractive as an ornamental and fruits consistently.

Peach and Nectarines

Peach and nectarine buds are killed when temperatures reach about -15° F. This occurs too frequently to depend on production in the Uintah Basin. Reliance, an exceptionally hardy variety, can withstand temperatures of -25° F. Other hardy varieties worth trying include: Veteran, Madison, Contender and Early Red Haven. Juneglo and Mericrest nectarines may be worth a try.

Table 1. Apple Varieties

Apple Variety	Harvest Date	Fire blight ¹	Powdery Mildew ¹	Comments
Cortland	Mid Sept – Early Oct	S	S	Good taste, good pollinator, hardy and productive.
Empire	Oct	MS	S	Good pollinator. McIntosh type with better color, less bruising and stores better than McIntosh.
Fuji	Late Oct	S	S	Ripens too late for many areas in the Basin, but has been successfully grown in Lapoint. Stores well. Very high quality fruit. May require detailed pruning.
Gala	Early Sept	S	S	Excellent flavor, excellent for applesauce or drying. May require heavy thinning.
Golden Supreme	Early Oct			Similar to Golden Delicious, but ripens 1 – 2 weeks earlier, annual bearing habit, less likely to russet. Uneven ripening.
Honeycrisp™	Late Sept	S		Large dappled red fruit with good flavor, crispness and juiciness. Hardy in Zone 4. Stores well.
Jonagold	Mid Sept – Early Oct	S	LS	Very high quality fruit. Not a good pollinator, short storage.
Jonafree	Mid Sept – Early Oct	MS		Very firm. Fruit tends to be small, careful pruning to avoid small fruit.
Prima	Mid Sept	MR	R	Blooms later and may avoid late spring frosts. Short storage.
Spartan	Mid Oct	MR	S	Crisp, firmer than McIntosh. Small fruit, may drop prematurely, difficult to thin.
Zestar!™	Late Aug – Early Sept			Large, crunchy, juicy red fruit with sweet-tart flavor. Excellent for both fresh eating and cooking. Tree is vigorous, upright, but susceptible to apple scab.

¹ S=susceptible, MS= moderately susceptible, LS= low susceptibility, MR=moderately resistance, R=resistant

Table 2. Apricot Varieties

Variety	Comments
Harglow	Blooms slightly later than most commercial apricots. The fruit is medium in size and bright solid orange in color; flesh is firm and flavorful. This variety is best suited for fresh eating.
Hargrand	Ripens in mid season. The fruit is a dull orange, but the size is excellent when the crop has been thinned. The flesh is juicy and tasty. Suitable for fresh eating.
Harlayne	Trees bloom late. Fruit production is heavy and fruit ripens late. Very hardy. The fruit has a red blush and is bright and attractive. Requires careful thinning to attain size. Suited for fresh eating but also suitable for home processing. The flesh is firm and fairly dry, and the mild flavor is fair to good.
Manchurian	This is the hardiest of the fruiting apricots.
Moongold	The golden fruits are medium size, sweet, juicy, ripen unevenly, prone to splitting, freestone.
Sungold	Fruits are small, mild, sweet.
Perfection	Trees are hardy and heavy bearing. Fruit is large, oval to oblong and flavorful. Flesh and skin are colored a bright yellow-orange with no blush. Good quality, firm-textured with

	early developing color. Needs cross pollination.
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Table 3. Pear Varieties

Variety	Comments
Anjou	About as hardy as Bartlett. Moderately resistant to fire blight.
Bartlett	Leading commercial variety in the west. May be partially self fertile. Susceptible to fire blight.
Clapp's Favorite	Hardy, fruit has sweet, fine flesh. Susceptible to fire blight.
Flemish Beauty	Hardy, fruit is firm and melting. Susceptible to fire blight.
Harrow Delight	Fire blight resistant.
Luscious	Fire blight resistant. Sweet, juicy fruit.
John	Fire blight resistant. Juicy fruit.
Summercrisp	Sweet flavored, crisp fruit. Fruit harvested when crisp, green with red blush, may be stored up to 2 months. One of the hardiest pear varieties.

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