

Walnuts without the wait

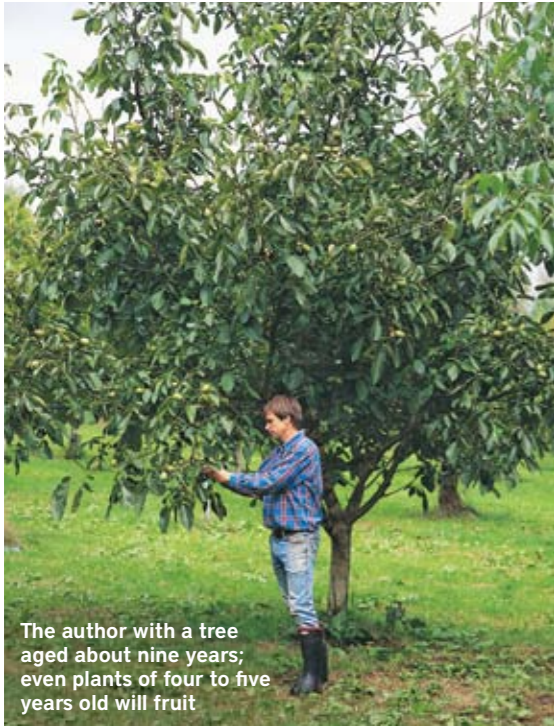
While walnuts are often regarded as susceptible to frost and slow to crop, **Martin Crawford** reveals that many grafted selections can bear fruit in as few as four years; some are also late to leaf-up, so are less likely to suffer in late cold snaps. Photography by Tim Sandall



RECOMMENDED WALNUT CULTIVARS

Select from both groups A and B for cropping (unless you have a partially self-fertile clone). The older cultivars listed are tip-bearers and late-leafing (except 'Rita', a smaller tree), helping to minimise spring frost damage. 'Plovdivski' ripens early, so is good for northern or high-altitude locations. The newer cultivars are lateral (spur) bearers with heavier crops than older cultivars.

older cultivars	nuts	crop	blight	group	self-fertile
'Broadview' ⁹	medium	heavy		A+B	partially
'Buccaneer' ⁸	medium	moderate	resistant	A+B	partially
'Chandler'	large	moderate		B	
'Coble's Number 2' ⁶	huge	light		A	
'Corne du Perigord'	medium	heavy	resistant	A+B	partially
'Franquette'	medium – large	heavy	resistant	A+B	partially
'Hartley' ⁵	medium – large	heavy	resistant	B	
'Meylannaise'	large	heavy	resistant	A	
'Parisienne' ¹⁰	large	moderate	resistant	B	
'Proslavski' ³	large	light	resistant	B	
'Rita'	large	moderate	resistant	A	
'Ronde de Montignac' ²	medium	heavy	resistant	A+B	partially
'Soleze' ¹	medium – large	heavy	resistant	B	
newer cultivars	nuts	crop	blight	group	self-fertile
'Ferjean'	medium	heavy	resistant	B	
'Fernor' ⁷	large	heavy	resistant	B	
'Fernette' ⁴	large	heavy	resistant	A	
'Lara'	large	moderate – heavy	resistant	B	



The author with a tree aged about nine years; even plants of four to five years old will fruit

TRADITIONALLY, COMMON walnut (*Juglans regia*) has been thought too slow to crop and unreliable in Britain, being near the northern limit of its range.

In fact, walnuts can be productive and superbly elegant trees, but admittedly are only suited to larger gardens, where even a lone tree can provide good crops of delicious nuts. If you have room for just one nut tree, a walnut should be the first you consider.

For good crops in a fairly short time, the key point is to choose a grafted cultivar: these can begin fruiting after four or five years as opposed to 15–20 years with a seedling tree.

Where and how to plant

Walnuts are wind pollinated and monoecious (bearing both male and female flowers), the inconspicuous flowers opening before or at the same time as the leaves. Early-leafing cultivars are susceptible to spring frost damage.

Trees are rarely self-fertile although some are partially self-fertile, the cultivar 'Broadview' being perhaps the most freely offered.

Fruiting cultivars are normally grafted to seedling walnut rootstock – there are no dwarfing rootstocks as yet. Most trees therefore, do get large, reaching in time and ideal conditions 30m (100ft) tall and as much as 15m (50ft) across. An exception is 'Rita', a much smaller cultivar reaching 8m (25ft); it is not partly self-fertile.

Walnuts need a sunny site out of frost pockets but with reasonable shelter. They prefer fertile, moisture-retentive but well-drained, loamy or clay/loam soils, around neutral (pH 7).

Space trees 8–15m (25–50ft) apart. Unless you are planting a partly self-fertile cultivar, you will need two trees that can cross-pollinate. Dig a good-sized planting hole – walnut roots are long, even on young trees. You can plant

on a slight mound to improve drainage. Trees up to 1–1.5m (3–5ft) high should not need staking, and larger trees will only need a stake for a couple of years. Mulch trees well.

Walnuts should be fed annually with a general-purpose fertiliser, compost or well-rotted manure.

Pruning and cropping

Formative pruning consists of removing low side branches to form a single, straight trunk of 1.8–2.5m (6–8ft) below the lowest main branches, providing access beneath for harvesting and to deter squirrels. If you do not intend to wrap trunks against squirrels, you can let trees branch lower. Annual pruning is unnecessary.

To harvest, simply pick nuts from the ground daily as they fall, over a period of two to three weeks for each tree. Use gloves to handle those that are wet, as juice from husks stains fingers brown.

MIXED NUTS
There is a wide variety in shape and size between different selections of walnut (above)

Trees in Britain reach full cropping at 20–25 years, when average yields of 50kg (110 lb) of nuts per tree can be had.

Pests and diseases

Walnut blight is a bacterial disease that causes spotting on leaves, but when it spreads to fruits causes them to blacken. Severe attacks, after cool, wet weather at flowering time, can lead to most of the crop being lost. It is worse in the west of Britain and most cultivars from Eastern Europe are susceptible; many from France are fairly resistant.

Grey squirrels are the worst pest. If they get into the tree you can lose the whole crop before nuts ripen and fall. Even then, you must beat them to the nuts on the ground when they fall. To stop squirrels getting into a tree it needs to be trained with a single high trunk which each summer you must wrap with plastic tree guard material (or some other smooth material), that

squirrels cannot grip. Also, the canopy needs to be 3m (10ft) from other trees to stop them jumping tree to tree.

Too few walnuts are being planted by gardeners in the UK. They are among the most characterful and shapely of trees when mature, and the nuts, eaten fresh or dried, are a delicacy too few are lucky enough to regularly enjoy. ■

Martin Crawford is director of the Agroforestry Research Trust

i Further reading
● *Walnuts: Production and Culture*, by Martin Crawford, Agroforestry Research Trust, 1996, £8, ISBN 9781874275282
● *Nutshell Guide to Growing Walnuts*, by Clive Simms, Orchard House Books, 2003, £3.50, ISBN 9780954460709

@ Further information
● Agroforestry Research Trust, Devon; 01803 840776; www.agroforestry.co.uk
● Grafted Walnut Trees, Carmarthenshire; 01558 669043; www.graftedwalnuts.co.uk