Since early times there has been great interest in growing fruit trees in pots or containers, probably to show off fruit-growing prowess or simply for convenience (there is evidence ancient Egyptians and Romans grew fruit in this way). Today, the desire to grow fruit in pots is more likely to be a necessity, due to limited garden space or a wish to cultivate fruit that need to be sheltered in winter.

In the past, growing some types of fruit trees in pots has not been easy – trees are not easily kept contained, even for those grafted (budded) on to rootstocks. However, breeding and introduction of dwarfing rootstocks (although it is worth noting highly dwarfing rootstocks should never be used in pots) and genetically dwarf cultivars has made growing of most tree fruits much more accessible to gardeners. Plant trees in clay or concrete pots (45–60cm/18–24in diameter) using John Innes No.3. Regular watering and good drainage is essential (make sure pots have plenty of drainage holes) and avoid adding bulbs or bedding to pots as these can affect tree health and nutrition.

**Potted benefits**

Points to consider when growing tree fruit in pots include:

✦ Trees will be restricted in growth and so may produce fewer fruit than you might expect if growing similar trees in open ground.

✦ Pot-grown trees can have a shorter life than those grown in open ground – but around 10 years is common.

✦ Trees need their roots to be pruned regularly to prevent plants becoming pot-bound. Adding new compost at this time is also beneficial.

✦ Regular watering is essential for good crops, as rainfall has little effect. Automatic irrigation systems can help avoid the fruit trees drying out.

The advantages of growing dwarf patio fruit trees are many. Being compact, it is possible to grow a good number in a minimal space and, usefully, they can be grown just outside the kitchen door.
Almonds, apricots, nectarines and peaches can be challenging to grow in the ground due to peach leaf curl. However, grown in pots, small trees can easily be covered in winter, which stops the spores of this fungal disease settling on the plant and infecting it.

Among the best adapted of all fruit trees for pots is fig. While there are no genetically dwarf selections and trees are not usually grafted, crops are most generous when fig roots are restricted. Growing in a pot also allows tender selections to be cultivated if protection under glass can be provided in winter.

Patio fruit trees may not yield as generously as trees in the ground but will produce a satisfying crop. And there are more suitable trees available than ever, so even in the smallest of gardens you can grow fruit – you could even create a potted orchard.

Fruit types

**Apricots**

Prunus armeniaca

Genetically dwarf or grafted?

Genetically dwarf apricots are available for growing as bush trees grown in containers receiving rootstocks allow other selections to grow in pots.

Site conditions required

To avoid frost damage to the delicate spring bloom, grow trees on a sheltered sunny position.

Good cultivars to choose

Dwarfs: 'Garden Aprigold' and 'Frutti Apricompak'.

On rootstocks: 'Delicot', 'Moorepark', 'Flavicolot' ('Bayote') and 'Tomcot'.

Pollination needs and rootstocks

Apricots are self-fertile so only one tree will be needed for fruit. Grow grafted cultivars on rootstocks: 'St. Julien A' or 'Krymks 86' if you are growing them in containers.

Eventual tree size

‘Garden Aprigold’ reaches 1.75m (5¾ft). 'Frutti Apricompak' is taller at 2m (6½ft). Cultivars on rootstocks are kept compact as bushes or fans.

**Almonds**

Prunus dulcis and P. x persica

One genetically dwarf almond is available and two others are suitable for growing in pots if grafted on to dwarfing rootstocks.

Best grown in a sunny sheltered position. Potted plants will produce good quantities of nuts if the attractive blossom is not damaged by frost.

**Cherries**

Prunus cerasus and P. avium

There are genetically dwarf cherries available but other selections also do well in pots if they are grafted on to a dwarfing rootstock.

Choose a position in a fairly sunny place. For a shaded or cold site try growing sour morello cherry (Prunus cerasus), the fruits of which are ideal for cooking.

**Medlars**

Mespilus germanica

Ornamental trees with attractive flowers, good autumn colour and strange-looking edible fruits. Two true dwarf cultivars now available.

These trees will tolerate partial shade, although they will crop better in a sunny position. Leaves and flowers can be damaged by strong winds.

**Nectarines**

Prunus persica var. nectarina

Genetically dwarf nectarines are available, others are suitable for pots of dwarfing rootstocks. Attractive blossom is a bonus.

Nectarines require similar growing conditions to apricots and peaches. They need a sunny, south or south-west facing position.

**Peaches**

Prunus persica

Genetically dwarf peaches are quite widely available and well suited to growing in containers without the need for dwarfing rootstocks.

Peaches need to be grown in a warm and sunny position so the fruits will ripen. Avoid frost pockets, and shelter from strong winds.

**Plums and gages**

Prunus domestica

One genetically dwarf plum is available on dwarf rootstocks some cultivars will grow in pots as vertical cordons or mini pyramids.

Best grown in a sunny, sheltered position. For cooler, northern areas 'Victoria' is a classic that will survive cooler temperatures.

**Quinces**

Cydonia oblonga

There are two genetically dwarf cultivars ideal for growing in containers; others are not suited to pot culture, even on dwarfing rootstocks.

Quince require a sunny, sheltered position, especially in north-facing gardens, as the fruits require a long season to ripen.

**Suppliers include**

- Blackmore Nurseries, 01440 47979, www.blackmore.co.uk
- Luberia, 01844 527 1658, www.luberia.co.uk
- Pomona Fruits, 01255 440410, www.pomonafruits.co.uk
- Terracruits, terracruits.com
- Thompson & Morgan, 0844 573 1818, www.thompson-morgan.com
- Lubera, 0845 527 1658

More from the RHS

- Quince Sibley’s Patent Quince

- Almonds

- Apricots

- Cherries

- Medlars

- Nectarines

- Peaches

- Plums and gages

- Quinces

For more information, search 'fruit in containers' at www.rhs.org.uk

**Apples and pears in containers**

While it is possible to grow apples and pears, in the pot, the few genetically dwarf selections currently available, while worth trying, could be less reliable than traditional cultivars grafted onto dwarfing rootstocks and grown as small vertical cordons or mini pyramids. For apples and pears and if you have two or three different cultivars to be grown for pollination.

**Apples:**


**Pears:**


- ‘Crisp’, ‘Granny Smith’ and ‘Gardner’s Pippin’

- ‘Bosc’, ‘Conference’, ‘Anjou’ and ‘Williams’ Bon Chrétien’

- ‘St. Julien A’ or ‘Krymks 86’

- ‘Garden Bing’, ‘Greening’s’ and ‘Bosc’

- ‘Garden Gold’ and ‘Old Golden Drop’

- ‘Triumph’, ‘Conference’, ‘Linnet’ and ‘Woolworth’s’

- ‘Garden Prince’ and ‘Golden Globe’

- ‘Garden Bing’, ‘Greening’s’ and ‘Bosc’

- ‘Garden Gold’ and ‘Old Golden Drop’

- ‘Triumph’, ‘Conference’, ‘Linnet’ and ‘Woolworth’s’

- ‘Garden Prince’ and ‘Golden Globe’