**Practical considerations**

The extent to which you want your fruit garden to be practical often comes down to the amount of time you want to spend maintaining it. While integrating fruit plants into ornamentalbiased designs can look attractive, it takes far less time and effort to carry out pruning or pest and disease control if those fruits with similar cultivation needs are grouped together. A fruit cage is the ultimate way to keep birds and larger mammals away from your fruits, but it may not suit your garden’s style or you may not have the space for one.

Growing acid-loving blueberries in pots may be the only option if you have a chalky soil, but when cultivated in this way, such container-grown fruit will require much more frequent watering and feeding than those plants set in the open ground. The least effort can be achieved by working with what your plot has to offer in the way of soil and aspect. In order to determine this, you should draw a plan of shady and sunny aspects in your garden, along with an indication of soil conditions. You can then choose crops that will thrive with minimal effort in those areas and conditions.

**Buying plants**

Once you have decided which plants you want to grow in your garden the next step is to source them. There are many specialist fruit growers supplying an excellent range of fruit types and varieties both at the nursery and via mail order. The best time to plant up a new garden is in midautumn, when plants are able to root quickly into the warm, moist soil and have at least six months before the onset of hot, summer weather. Failing this, any time up until and including early spring will produce good results, bearing in mind that the later you plant the less time the fruit will have to establish before the summer.

Fruit can be purchased as: bare-root; containerized (having spent its whole life in a pot). Bare-root plants are available to buy on ly between midautumn and midspring but they are much less expensive than potted plants and establish just as well if not better. This is ideal if you require large numbers of plants or are on a limited budget. They are occasionally sold as root-wrapped bundles – as with raspberry canes, for example. Plants in pots are more costly but they have the advantage that they can be planted at any time of year – useful if you need to plant in summer. However, they too will establish considerably better if planted between midautumn and midspring.

When choosing your fruit plants always check that varieties of the same crops are in compatible pollination groups, should cross-pollination be required for that particular variety to set fruit. Those with smaller plots should also opt for naturally dwarfing varieties or those grafted onto dwarfing rootstocks to restrict their final size.

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**Fruit production chart**

Unless you have lots of grateful neighbours or a large freezer it can be frustrating to experience the gluts and dearths of a fruit garden’s harvest. Careful planning at the outset and use of various storage methods can, however, keep these peaks and troughs to a minimum.

Freezing Many fruits such as raspberries and currants freeze very well, and can be defrosted then used in their fresh state. Lay such fruits on a tray so they’re not touching, then freeze them; once frozen, bag them up. Other fruits such as plums and gages can be frozen raw but are best cooked before eating, while yet others such as apples and pears are best frozen in their cooked state.

Drying Drying fruits is a very useful way to preserve them. The fruits once dehydrated can be used in cakes, breads, or similar foodstuffs, or eaten on their own as naturally sweet snacks. A food dehydrator is ideal piece for this job – the slatted trays having warm air blown over them for a set period. Alternatively, use a domestic oven on its lowest setting, leaving the door slightly ajar.

Yield The expected yield given is for a mature, healthy plant. For tree fruits in particular the yield can be extremely variable depending on the training method chosen – for example, an apple bush will yield much more fruit than an apple cordon. Fruit yield is also very dependent on the year’s weather. Consequently a figure has been provided only as a rough guide.

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* fresh from plant  * from storage  best when cooked first  use as a baking/sweetening agent  per tree  per plant  per bush  per vine