Deciduous trees are a good Water Wise choice for summer rainfall gardens, as they don’t need much water during the dry winter, when they are dormant. It is easy to grow a peach, apricot, pear or plum tree – just make sure that you choose self-pollinating plants or plant the required pollinator as well.

**How to grow fruit trees**

The following steps will give your tree a good start:

- **Choose a sunny place.**
- **Make a hole 1m x 1m x 1m.** Keep the fertile topsoil in a separate heap.
- **Mix 2 parts topsoil with 1 part compost and a cup of superphosphate and return to the hole with lots of compost.**
- **To make deep watering easy, insert a pipe in the hole with one end sticking out before you fill up the hole.**
- **Cut open the planting bag, remove the tree and plant at the same level as it was in the bag. The stem must not be buried any deeper than it already is.**
- **Make a large basin around the tree to hold water.** For the first two years, water once a week. Then slow down to twice, and then once a week.
- **Put a layer of mulch 10cm deep around the tree that reaches as far as its outermost branches.** The roots of a tree grow out as far as the branches, so by mulching this area you are keeping the soil moist for the roots. Keep the mulch 10cm away from the tree trunk. Use grass, bark chips, pebbles or leaves and keep replacing.

- In the first two years, give each fruit tree 1 bucket of manure with 2 handfuls of superphosphate fertiliser in August. In the next two years, give each fruit tree 2 buckets of manure and 4 handfuls of superphosphate. Thereafter, give 3 buckets of manure and 8 handfuls of superphosphate per tree. Manure should always be well composted before using.

**Choosing your fruit**

- **Apricots.** Its attractive shape makes the apricot a useful shade tree. The fruit can be eaten fresh, bottled, made into jam or dried. Water in late winter and early spring as all apricots ripen in early summer. They are self-pollinating, so a single tree can be planted. Choose from:
  - ‘Bulida’ – ripens in November.
  - ‘Peeka’ – ripens in December.
  - ‘Bebeko’ – ripens in December.
• **Peaches.** These can be picked for six months of the year, depending on the variety, from October to March. In some districts, late frosts can cause damage to early blossoming cultivars, so choose only late ripening cultivars in these areas. Harvest them only when they are fully ripe. Choose from the following yellow clingstone peaches:
  - 'Summer Sun' and 'Goudveld' – ripen in November.
  - 'Oom Sarel' – ripens in December.
  - 'Prof Neethling', 'Impora', 'Keimoes' and 'Kakamas' – ripen in January.
  - 'Kokstaat' and 'Klara' – ripen in February.

• **Pears.** These grow well in areas where the winters are cold and the summers are not too hot. However, cultivars such as 'Keiffer', 'Packham's Triumph' and 'Le Conte' bear fairly well in the higher parts of the Lowveld. The tree bears on the same spurs every year and, once the required shape is achieved, little pruning is necessary. Pick pears before they are ripe as they tend to become floury if left to ripen on the trees. Store the fruit in a dark cupboard. Choose from the following:
  - 'Early Bon Chretien' – ripens in December/January. Yellow-green skin. Plant also 'Forelle' as a pollinator.
  - 'Forelle' – ripens in February/March. Yellow skin with blush. Plant also 'Keiffer' as a pollinator.

• **Plums.** The plum dessert varieties are best for eating, while the small sour ones are perfect for cooking. Do not allow plums to overcrop (especially the variety 'Methley') as there is a risk that the branches will break. Rather thin the fruits. Choose from the following:
  - 'Sungold' – ripens in January. Yellow plum. Plant also 'Santa Rosa' as a pollinator.
How to prune fruit trees

The method of pruning all deciduous fruit trees in their first couple of years is basically the same. The first three years of growth are important for establishing the subsequent growth patterns and shape of the tree, and correct pruning is essential. Prune your fruit trees in June or July.

As soon as fruit trees reach the age of three, they divide into different groups, each requiring a slightly different approach to pruning. The reason is that the different species each produce fruit in different ways. For example, apricots produce fruit on spurs and peaches on wood that is at least a season old.

A. Pruning a one -year-old fruit tree
Deciduous fruit trees bought at a nursery are usually one season old. Plant as described above. Prune lightly to shape the framework of the tree.

B. Pruning a two-year-old fruit tree
Look closely at the many branches that have grown during the summer and identify 4 to 5 good stems which will give the tree a cup-shaped structure. Prune these stems to a height of 75cm and cut just above an outward-facing bud. Remove all other growth.

C. Pruning a three-year-old fruit tree
The aim of this last formative pruning during the third winter is to establish a second framework. This involves selecting 3 good shoots growing from each of the 4 or 5 stems chosen the year before. Prune the selected 3 new shoots on each branch back to a uniform length of 50cm. Take out any diseased or dead wood.
Fruit fly solution

Fruit fly can attack your fruit and spoil it. To prevent this happening, make fruit fly traps out of plastic bottles filled with a liquid bait and hang them in your fruit trees when the fruit starts forming. A mesh cover over the opening will keep beneficial insects, such as bees, from entering the trap. To make bait, mix together 5 tablespoons of brown sugar and 1 tablespoon of brown vinegar. Heat until they boil and then allow to cool. Then add ½ a mashed over-ripe banana.

Make apricot jam to sell

Ingredients:

- 1½ kg apricots (8 cups of cut up apricots)
- ½ cup water
- 1½ kg sugar (6½ cups)

Method: Wash the apricots, cut in half and remove the pips. Place apricots and water in pan and slowly bring to boil. Simmer for 20 minutes. Then gradually add the sugar to the fruit, while stirring. Boil until the jam sets when a little is tested on a cold plate. This should take about 30 minutes. Pour into sterilised jam jars.

Note: Sterilise your jam jars and their lids by putting them into boiling water for 10 minutes just before you fill them with jam.