

Deciduous Fruit Trees At the Tucson Extension Garden Center

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By 1977 it was obvious from the many calls received at the Extension Garden Center that there was strong public interest in growing apple trees in home yards of Tucson.

Several varieties of trees were obtained from Stark Brothers and planted in pairs at the Center in the spring of 1978, together with peaches and apricots. In no case was the rootstock known, and this aspect may have a bearing on the varying success and failure of the varieties. Early in the summer, chlorosis developed, and it continues to show itself each year. At first, this was thought to be caused by herbicide residues, then by various nutrient deficiencies, but in spite of spraying with iron, zinc, and copper during the spring growing periods, the symptoms persist. There has been particularly bad die-back on the following varieties: GoldKist Apricot, Mid-Pride Peach, and Golden Amber Apricot.

The orchard soils comprise three feet of heavy silt overlaying clear white coarse sand of unknown depth. The drainage disparities of these two materials make for difficult management. Where some trees did poorly, it was thought too much water was responsible, so the drip irrigation system was cut back and a program of irrigation, dependent on soil moisture to three feet, was followed.

Apple varieties that are an unqualified success are Ann and Ein Scheimer. They ripen early in the season (July) and usually avoid sun damage, heat and green fig beetle. Fruit is crisp and tasty but does not keep well. Yields have been consistently high since the second year after planting. For the first few years birds were not interested in the fruit, but are now, and so are rock squirrels. Bird nets and traps provide the answers.

Prima Red and Stark Gala are apple varieties that show promise. The harvest is later, lasting from mid-July to the end of August, and thus becomes subject to damage from green fig beetle. However, the fruit does not seem to be damaged by the sun.

Gordon Apple, given glowing reports by Sunset Magazine, has not produced any fruit in the five years of planting and shows signs, in the long shot length, of not getting enough winter chilling. Winters have been milder than usual during this period, and Red Delicious and Tropical Beauty apples have not produced any fruit since they were planted in the spring of 1979. It is too early to expect fruit from Granny Smith (1985), Dorsett (1985) (1983) or Red Delicious (1980).

From experience, a recommendation is made to plant trees in the fall rather than in the spring, when hot weather comes too quickly. Spring plantings of Granny Smith have been most disappointing. Akane Tomako failed after three years.

Apricots have been disappointing. Golden Amber (1979) has given small crops, and the tree has just about died back entirely. One of the GoldKist has done well; the other has sever die-back.

Peaches have shown die-back characteristics, but good crops of quality fruit were obtained from Mid-Pride until the green fig beetle appeared. Early Elberta produced good quality but late fruit.

We have new plantings of other varieties which are primarily for demonstration purposes and are used to show pruning methods, drip irrigation systems, and bird protection netting. Frequent and constant reference to them in newspapers and on television has kept pace with public interest. As a result, three nurseries have stocked low-chill deciduous fruit in a serious manner, and other nurseries have sold numerous apple trees of varying descriptions.