Growing Fruit in High Altitude Gardens

Growing fruit in the Tri Lakes area presents some unique challenges. Our cold temperatures, short growing season, late frosts, hungry wildlife, and high winds can seem like a lot to overcome for a bountiful harvest, but you can tip the odds in your favor by following these tips...

- Choose appropriate fruit varieties – They need to be the correct cold hardiness zone; they need to bloom late enough in the spring to hopefully avoid a late frost and they need to ripen early enough in the fall so you get to enjoy the fruit.
    - This is especially true for fruit trees. Every spring in Colorado is different. One year you may get an abundant harvest while other years you may not. Apples, Plums, and Sour Cherries often give better odds at yielding a good harvest due to their later bloom time. Apricots, Pears, and Peaches, while plenty cold hardy, often bloom very early. This means that if we get a late frost during blossom then you risk not getting any fruit. Choosing late blooming varieties can greatly increase your chances of avoiding getting nipped in the bud.
    - Also keep in mind that Apples, Pears, and Sweet Cherries usually require a second variety to act as a pollinizer for cross-pollination. A pollinizer is a different variety that blooms at the same time and produces genetically suitable pollen. Pollinizers should be planted within 100' of each other. Many varieties of Crabapples are effective pollinizers for Apple Trees.
- Expect to have competition from wildlife. Squirrels, birds, rabbits, deer, and even the occasional bear would surely enjoy some snacks from your garden. Bird netting and fencing can help limit the amount of fruit most animals can reach.
- Location is key – Choose a location that optimizes sun exposure and wind protection. Most fruit require at least 6 hours of sun a day. High Winds are common in the Tri Lakes and affect fruit harvest in a variety of ways. Wind forces flowers to fall off, which can disrupt pollination, and may result in no fruit production. Wind can also cause premature fruit drop. If fruit falls before it is fully matured, it may result in under-ripe harvests and more food for critters. Drying winds can also cause scorched leaves due to desiccation.

Native and Small Fruit for Tri Lakes Area Gardens

Native fruits are born to thrive in our environment. They can withstand the temperature changes and harsh winds and are naturally rock star producers for short seasons. Consider growing native varieties of fruit such as...

- Chokecherry
- Currant
- Red-Berried Elderberry
- Serviceberry
- Western Sandcherry

Small Fruiting shrubs and perennials are a great choice because they are self-pollinating, ripen early, they're easier to protect from wildlife, and they are small enough that you could have a wide variety of fruit in a small area. In addition to the native small fruit listed above, these are also great options...

- Black Chokeberry (Aronia)
- Goji Berry
- Gooseberries
- Grapes
- Nanking Cherry
- Strawberries
- Raspberries

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