



Fruit Tree Paradise

Tropical Fruit
Society of Sarasota

November 28, 2017





Fruit on a Sabara jaboticaba tree, *Myrciaria jaboticaba*



Fruit Tree Paradise 1

The southwest coast of Florida
is the best place in the world
to grow fruit.

--- Steve Cucura

Why?

- Subtropical climate with wet summers – supports a wide variety of fruit species
- Subtropical climate – many tropical pests cannot survive here
- Sandy soil
- Government, academic, and private research and extension services support growers
- Government services fight importation of pests
- ~~Hurricanes rarely strike Florida's west coast~~
- *Active fruit tree clubs supporting home growers*

Whether or not it's the very best in the world, how can fruit tree horticulture in southwest Florida be improved?

Later...



Luckiest Guy On The Planet

Retired from something or other.

Living in paradise.

Fruit Tree Paradise 2

SweetSong Groves, my
2-acre tropical fruit farm
in north Sarasota County





Josh Starry, co-creator

My Horticultural Philosophy

Problems in fruit tree horticulture stem mostly from two causes:

1. bad ecologies

2. bad root systems

A fruit tree is an adaptive system with enormous imbedded intelligence, and will thrive in a rich ecology reasonably close to its native ecology. As long as it has a good root system.

Fruit Tree Horticulture In Six Words

Prune aggressively,

mulch heavily,

fertilize conservatively.

Prune Aggressively

1. Control tree size.
2. Strengthen tree against wind, climbing animals.
3. Open up the interior to light and air.
4. Increase the root-to-foliage ratio to promote new growth and provide energy for fruiting.

Prune Aggressively To Limit Size



Prune Aggressively To Limit Size



Tip Prune to Promote Branching



Tip Prune to Promote Branching



Prune To Develop Good Branch Architecture





Mulch Heavily and Fertilize Conservatively

1. The best fertilizer is MULCH. It breaks down slowly, adding nutrients while building the soil ecology to improve plant health and disease resistance. Also, it stabilizes soil temperature and moisture, prevents erosion, suppresses weeds, and interrupts the life cycles of some insect pests such as Sri Lankan weevils and diaprepes.
2. Minimize or even avoid nitrogen except perhaps on immature trees, and on bananas.
3. Among our favorite soil amendments: azomite, langbeinite (sul-po-mag), elemental sulfur (acidifies), crushed crabshell (supports the soil ecology), biochar (holds nutrients). Gypsum may be needed, eventually, to remedy the calcium-potassium imbalance of mulch.
4. An occasional foliar application of liquid kelp seems to work wonders.

Free mulch from the local tree pruners



Other Advice

1. Unless you are a very devoted grower, avoid species that have drawbacks: temperamental fruiterers (lychees, annonas), poorly-adapted temperate-climate or dry-climate fruits (stone fruits, pomegranates, pears, apples), pest and disease-prone species (citrus, guava, peaches), freeze-intolerant species (jakfruit, coconuts, soursop, ...). Good choices include: mango, loquat, longan, starfruit, sapodilla, canistel, avocado, white sapote, black sapote, jaboticaba, mulberry.

2. Remove fruit from young grafted trees, so they can spend their energy growing, not making a few fruit.

3. Plant on mounds ----->

4. Free and perhaps prune the roots when you plant.

5. Consider thinning fruit from mature trees, especially starfruit, loquats, longans, stone fruit, wax jambu.

6. Invest in automatic irrigation if you possibly can.



How can fruit tree horticulture in southwest Florida be improved?

Market expansion.

Today, almost the only people who eat rare fruit are

- aficionados
- immigrants and their families who know the good fruits
- some of the farmer's market crowd

Why should people be going to Publix and buying temperate-climate fruits from thousands of miles away?



SweetSong Groves

- In 2016 I formed an LLC to sell tropical and subtropical fruit in my local area.
- If things go really well, I expect to recover my initial investment by 2065, when I will be 114. But luckily the purpose is not to make money, but rather to build the local tropical fruit market, produce healthy local food, support other growers both amateur and professional, and regenerate my land.
- Website is sweetsonggroves.com.

Fruit Tree Paradise Workshop

3-hour introductory class
taught in spring and in fall –
you can obtain info and
download the handouts at
sweetsonggroves.com



Some ideas for expanding markets:

1. Promote **home growing**. It raises fruit consciousness.
2. **Educate consumers** about tropical fruit, how to tell when it's ripe, how to prepare it, etc.
3. Start young. Promote fruit trees in **school gardens**.
4. Fresh and local: support **farm-to-table** food at restaurants and in schools.
5. Support local food businesses and develop them as **sales outlets**.
6. **Make it easy** for consumers: mobile delivery services, CSA's.

