



Fruit Tree Paradise



Sustainable Urban
Agriculture Coalition

St. Petersburg, FL
February 5, 2018





Sabara jaboticaba, *Myrciaria jaboticaba*

First The Bad News

- These days citrus is one of the most difficult kinds of fruit to grow these days, due to so many pests and diseases.
- In particular, “citrus greening” is an incurable bacterial disease spread by a certain kind of Asian fruit fly. It's generally unavoidable except by constant high-toxicity spraying.
- If you have an established citrus tree, it's worth keeping it going as long as it will give good fruit. Use both soil fertilizer and foliar spray fertilizer (e. g. liquid kelp).
- Tangerines, tangelos, and oranges are difficult, and grapefruit is the most difficult. I recommend leaving them to the professionals, and devoting your efforts to some of the many wonderful “rare” fruits that work well here.
- Lemons seem more disease resistant and sometimes do fairly well. Perhaps still worth a try.

Now The Good News

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 with cool winters – 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*

Grafted Trees



Grafted Trees

For most species, you will want to spend the \$35 or \$40 to obtain a grafted tree of a named variety:

1. An exact genetic copy of the scion tree, which has been selected to have desirable characteristics, such as high-quality fruit, small tree size, disease resistance, or adaptability to our climate.
2. Hormonally it is a mature tree, and will produce fruit as soon as it is physically large enough. With a seedling tree, you might have a ten-year wait for some species.
3. It's easier to prevent a grafted tree from growing upward--- it's actually a big branch that wants to spread, not a tree that wants to rush upward to compete for light.

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, weight of fruit.
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, jaborcaba, 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.

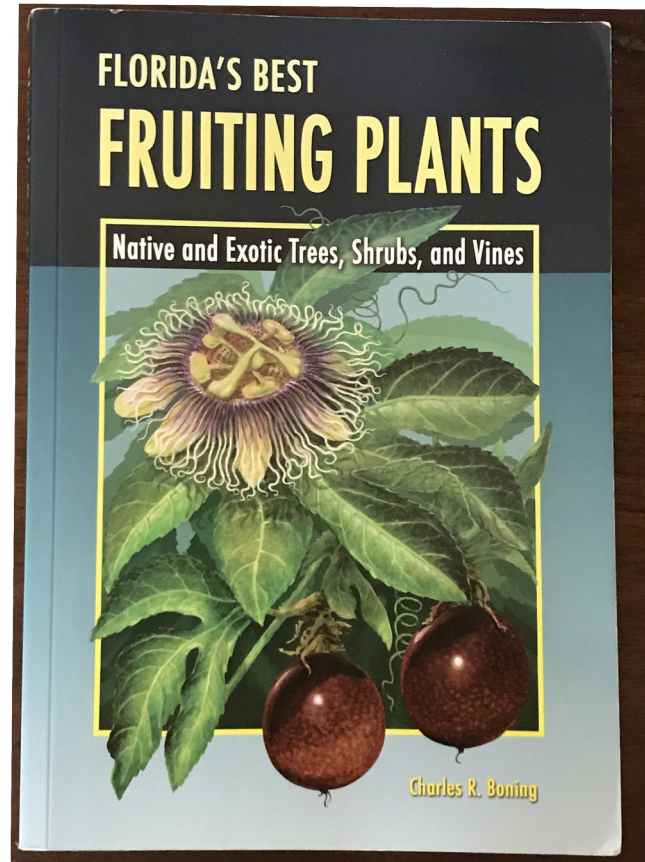
5. Consider thinning fruit from mature trees, especially starfruit, loquats, longans, stone fruit, wax jambu.

6. Invest in automatic irrigation if you possibly can.



Learn The Easy Way

- The best first book: *Florida's Best Fruiting Plants*, by Charles Boning (but the information on varieties is generally out of date)



Learn The Easy Way

Our area has excellent local fruit tree clubs:

- Tampa Bay Rare Fruit Council
- Manatee Rare Fruit Council
- Tropical Fruit Society of Sarasota
- Suncoast Tropical Fruit and Vegetable Club (Venice)



**Suncoast Tropical
Fruit and
Vegetable Club**

Nokomis, FL

Learn The Easy Way

My 3-hour introductory class, the Fruit Tree Paradise Workshop, is taught in spring and in fall – **the handouts for the class are free downloads from my website.**

Also, there are free monthly tours during the cool season.



Online Information Sources

- YouTube videos – some are excellent, and some...
- Tropical Fruit Forum – a discussion board
- growables.org – lots of good information specific to our region)
- UF/IFAS publications – can be informative, but generally oriented toward commercial growers
- *Fruits of Warm Climates*, by Julia Morton, freely available online – an older reference but an excellent source for rare, tropical species
- it's a good idea to include the word “Florida” when you do a web search

SweetSong Groves





Josh Starry, co-creator of
SweetSong Groves



SweetSong Groves, LLC

- My small company SweetSong Groves LLC, was founded in 2016. It is dedicated to selling top-quality tropical fruit in our local region. Sales are getting started as trees reach production size. (*Secret agenda: market expansion.*)
- 2-acre residential property in north Sarasota County, eventually around 200 fruit trees, of which perhaps 150 will be “production” trees. Think commercial grove + botanical park.
- We are working on organic certification, but actually we grow *ecologically*, i. e. non-toxic methods far beyond organic standards.
- If things go 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.
- A goal is for our website, sweetsonggroves.com, and in fact our entire enterprise, to become an educational resource for both consumers and growers.

Alex Salazar's mango cultivar recommendations:

Very Early season: Edward, Dwarf Hawaiian

Early Season: Angie, Pickering (a true dwarf!), Ah Ping, Fairchild

Mid-season: Cac, Super Julie, Maha Chanok, Kesar

Late Season: Himsagar, Neelam, perhaps Cotton Candy and M-4

Best overall choice for limited space: **Pickering**

Avoid: Kent, Keitt, Haden, Lemon Zest, Springfels, Southern Blush, Lancetilla, Palmer, Venus, Eldon

