

A Few Fruits and Berries for Truckee

from Villager Nursery, Truckee, CA

Strawberry-Rhubarb Pie. Chokecherry jelly on sourdough toast. Warm plum-crabapple sauce over vanilla ice cream. Plump raspberries. Fresh, crisp, juicy apples. Truckee grown. Space in your landscape can yield much more than just visual beauty, it can produce a bounty for you to eat: Herbs and vegetables, above and below ground, tender annuals and hardy perennials, berries of many kinds on high bush and low bush or vines and canes, and trees full of fruit.

In Cold Climate Gardening Louis Hill relates a story of his neighbor who tells him "I've just planted hardy grapes." "I wish you'd talked with me first," Lewis replies. "I was afraid you'd talk me out of it. The catalog said they were hardy way up in Canada, and when I called they assured me that they would do fine in our climate," says the neighbor.

It is sometimes difficult to accept the reality of our climate (Repeat after me: "There is no average last date of frost.") Too often people only want the good news and are irritated that we would discourage their well-researched endeavor. Folks will bring up plants from Reno or from catalogs, assured of success, only to have crop failures and plant losses year after year, believing that they have done something wrong. We have a more challenging climate than maps can tell you. There are still many plants that easily produce fruit. Villager Nursery offers as many varieties as we can find or grow that will thrive here (USDA zone 3-4 tells only a small part of the story).

BERRIES

Strawberries (*Fragaria* spp.) are a must if you are planning on having rhubarb. There is no reason why everyone living in Truckee shouldn't have a patch or a pot planted with strawberries. They produce well and have beautiful red fall color as a groundcover. A few of our favorite everbearing cultivars include: 'Albion', 'Fern', 'Ft. Laramie', 'Quinalt', and 'Seascape.' The alpine strawberries (*Fragaria vesca*) are small but intense and delicious with many times the flavor of their hybrid



cousins. The yellow and white varieties are seldom found by birds.

Raspberries (*Rubus* spp.) This genus is called the brambles. Raspberries have perennial roots and crowns, but their canes live for only two summers. During the first year, the new cane (primocane) grows, is dormant in winter, and during the second growing season blooms and produces fruit (called a florican), then dies. New primocanes are produced each year, so fruit production continues. Raspberries can spread via underground stems or stolons in any direction to create a "raspberry patch." Red raspberries are best: they require only minimal care, grow fast and are reliable producers. Our native thimbleberry is a vigorous, edible bramble and we have had good success with the trailing native California blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*). Yellow raspberries, summer fruiting varieties, and most blackberries do not produce well. Salmonberry dies back in most of Truckee, but would be worth a try at the warmer lake shores.

VINES

Kiwifruit (*Actinidia* spp.) Being dioecious, they need a male and female plant in close proximity. In some of the hardiest species, males can take USDA z.3 cold but female plants die in z.5. We have some incredibly vigorous males in the landscape.

Actinidia arguta 'Issai' a new, self-fertile hardy (z.4) kiwi. It has fragrant white flowers followed by smooth-skinned fruit (we have not seen fruit... yet). Planting an **A. arguta** 'Meader' (a z.3 male) would enhance pollination.

Actinidia kolomikta 'Red Beauty' (female) and 'Arctic Beauty' (variegated male) are both z. 3

Vitis spp. - The hardiest grape we've grown is a USDA z.2 frost grape, *Vitis riparia*, that often waits until June to leaf-out but we've never seen fruit on it here. We have more late spring and summer frosts than many colder (in winter) regions north of us where days are much longer.

Grapes have been known to produce in Truckee, in warm microclimates, with good exposure, surrounded by rocks and where warm air rises around them. Worth trying: 'Concord', 'De Chaunac', 'Niagara', 'Norton/Cynthiana', 'Rougeon', 'Himrod'

Hop vine (*Humulus spp.*) Hops, (technically not a fruit but a flower) are produced from extremely hardy and drought-tolerant root crowns that grow annual vines to 30' long and die back to the ground each winter. Hop flowers used for beer making are only on female plants. Villager generally offers several varieties of female clones, including but not limited to: 'Cascade', 'Centennial', 'Comet', 'Nugget', 'Perle', 'Tettnanger', 'Willamette' and the golden ornamental 'Aurea.'

BUSH FRUIT

Appreciated for their usefulness in any landscape or hedge with the added benefit of producing large amounts of colorful delicious fruit.

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier spp.*) is a close relative of pear and, while not quite as sweet, it is an easy-to-grow North American native.

Aronia / Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) produces large juicy fruit and screaming-red fall colors. The fruit is used for syrups and jellies with added lemon-juice and sugar.

Haskap, Blue-Berried Edible Honeysuckle (*Lonicera caerulea*) Extremely hardy (USDA z. 1) circumpolar shrub with large elongated sweet, blue berries. It has been used for fruit production from Canada to Siberia and Japan. It prefers moist acidic soils. They are self-sterile so you need two varieties for fruit production. *Lonicera caerulea* var. *cauriana*, is a local native found in meadows and along streams.

Gogi Berry (*Lycium spp.*) There are native species of *Lycium* throughout the west but you'll find fruit-producing varieties in many of the oldest western towns where Chinese railroad workers lived. It appears they planted seeds of these incredibly tough plants that still thrive today. Truckee has several large patches downtown. 'Dynamite' and 'Firecracker' have larger fruit.

Sierra Plum / Pacific Plum (*Prunus subcordata*) is native in much of California including the high and dry Modoc plateau. It has 1" fruit, red fall color, is very drought tolerant and cold hardy.

Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*) is a fast growing native with various subspecies across North America (and closely related *Prunus padus*, in Europe). Selections of chokecherry often grow as fast or faster than Aspen, are more drought

tolerant, have pink to red fall colors and produce fruit that makes incredibly tasty and beautiful jelly.

Currants and Gooseberries (*Ribes spp.*) are seldom bothered by frosts. They may be on bushes from one to six feet tall with many colors of flower and great shades of fall colors, and they all yield abundantly. We have dozens of native and cultivated species and varieties to choose from not limited to: Red currant, black currant, garden gooseberry, Jostaberry, Tasti-Berry, golden currant, and several more natives with edible but less delectable fruit.

Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) bushes may reach a height of eight ft. or more, grow twice as wide, and produce many pounds of tiny fruit. If you freeze whole clusters of the ripe berries and then allow them to thaw, the berries just fall off the stems. Red elderberries (*S. racemosa*) are only edible if cooked. *Sambucus canadensis* and *S. caerulea* are all now all considered *Sambucus nigra*.



American Highbush Cranberry (*Viburnum opulus* var. *americanum*) is closely related to European cranberry bush which has been used in hedges for centuries. Many existing hedges in the UK are estimated to have been planted in the medieval period, growing for over 700 years. The first hedges enclosed land crops during the Neolithic age over 4000 years ago. Recently all American *Viburnum trilobum* and European *V. opulus* were determined to be of the same genus.

Blueberry (*Vaccinium spp.*). The best blueberries for production in our area are crosses between Northern Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) and Lowbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*) called "Mid-High Blueberries" with variety names like 'Northsky', 'Northcountry' and 'Polaris' (the North star). We often offer the native high-elevation and circumboreal

Bog Blueberry (*Vaccinium uliginosum*). All are worth growing for their spectacular magenta fall colors if not their delicious fruit.

TREE FRUIT

There are many varieties of apple, a few pear, cherry and plum. Your own yard is unique in many ways, and if you notice a garden near you, stop and talk to the gardener and learn what has gardened in your neck of the woods. We never intend to discourage experimentation (we certainly do it all the time), but do it small. Be sure to share your success and failures with us so we can share your results and we'll all benefit from your experiences.

APPLES



Most apple trees are very hardy. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of apples growing along Sierra Nevada roads, ditches and rivers... the results of cores being tossed from the windows of trains or cars. Many apple varieties do not bear well when grown alone because they

need a "pollenizer" variety close by. Planting a self-fertile variety is an easy solution. Voles, rabbits and winter sun will damage trunks of young trees if not protected. Root-guards will protect roots from gophers. Bears and raccoons may attempt to climb young trees (if you allow fruiting) and can destroy your efforts in a snap. Here are a few commonly used varieties.

VARIETY	FLOWERING TIME	HARVEST TIME	COLOR	USES AND QUALITY
Centennial Crab	Mid 3	Early-Mid	Red-Orange	2" fruit. Excellent eating or cooking. Self-sterile.
Chestnut Crab	Mid 3	Mid	Bronze-Red	2" w/ wonderful flavor.
Cortland	Mid 3	Late	Bright Red	Medium size, crisp, juicy. Part self-fertile
Dolgo Crab	Mid 2	Early	Red	Self-fertile, large tree.
Earligold	Early	Mid	Yellow	Fresh, cooking; high quality, self-fertile
Esopus Spitzenberg	Mid-Late 4	Mid-Late	Red-Orange	T.J.'s favorite. Aromatic w/ exceptional flavor.
Haralred	Late	Late	Red	Fresh, cooking, cider, Hardy. Firm, juicy, tart

Haralson	Late	Late	Red-striped	Cooking; tart, Juicy. Very hardy.
Hazen	Early	Mid-Late	Red	Fresh, cooking; mild flavor, hardy.
Honeycrisp	Mid	Late	Red striped	All-around; stores well, 3-4" fruit. Crisp.
Honeygold	Mid 3	Late	Yellow	Fresh, cooking a hardier Yellow Delicious.
Liberty	Early-Mid 2	Mid-Late	Dark red	Scab resistant; good fresh, fair for cooking.
Lodi (Transparent)	Early 2	Very Early	Yellow	Cooking; fair quality.
Mcintosh	Early-Mid 2	Mid-Late	Red blush	All-around; tart, tender, Juicy, heavy producer.
Norland	Early	Early	Green w/ Red	Dwarf. Pick B4 mature for excellent preserving.
Northern Spy	Very Late 5	Late	Yellow-striped red	Honeyed / Scented, Long-Keeper.
Spartan	Mid 3	Late	Red	Strawberry, raspberry, sweet-sharp, self-fertile .
State Fair	Early 2	Early-Mid	Red-Orange striped	Juicy aromatic, sweet and firm.
Sweet Sixteen	Mid 3	Mid-Late	Red-striped	Large, red striped fruit. Firm, crisp.
Wealthy	Mid 3	Mid	Bright Red	Excellent dessert and multi-use.
Yellow Transparent	Early-Mid 2	Early	Green-Yellow	Tart. Heavy producer.

PEARS

Bartlett Pear (*Pyrus x*) Originated as 'Williams' in Berkshire, England, ~1770 and imported to Mass. ~1799 by Enoch Bartlett (American namesake). Most pears require a separate variety for pollination, but 'Bartlett' is self-fertile and will fruit without another variety nearby. Pick pears when the fruit has a faint yellow blush but is still green. 'Summercrisp', 'Clapp's Favorite', 'Honeysweet' and 'Moonglow' are varieties worth trying when available.

CHERRIES

Most **sweet cherries** are difficult to grow but '**Lapins**' is a moderately hardy, self-fruitful variety that has been known to produce here. '**Blackgold**', a late-flowering, self-fertile, sweet cherry selection developed by Cornell University, is reported as tolerant to spring frost. Most tree cherries are selections of *Prunus avium*. There is a spectacular *P. avium* 'Mazzard' (a rootstock that grew out beyond the dead Kwanzan cherry scion) at the west end of Commercial Row and Spring St. in downtown Truckee that produces small sweet cherries most years in July.

Dark Tart Cherries have high Brix / sugar but with enough citric acid to make them "tart." They are often eaten fresh, but are more commonly used (fresh and dried) in cooking, cakes, tarts, and pies. A little extra sugar balances the acidity and brings out the flavor.

'**Montmorency**' is very early-ripening, growing fruit with shiny red skin, bright yellow flesh and clear juice starting in late July. This variety is hardy from zone 4 to 8, grows from 8 to 15 feet high with a 10- to 20-foot spread, and is able to withstand colder temperatures better than other varieties. The Montmorency cherry is perfect for pies, preserves and as a candied snack.

'**Evans Bali**' is a dwarf variety that produces dark red one-inch fruit that is perfect for jams, sauces and snacking because of its exceptional sweetness. Growing to 12 feet tall and 9 feet wide, Evans trees are exceptionally cold hardy and thrive in USDA zone 3.



llager Nursery

'**Dwarf North Star**' is a smaller, cold-hardy variety created by the University of Minnesota in 1950. Ripening in late July, disease-resistant North Star cherries are well suited for pies, baking and as

snacks. 'North Star' only grows 8 to 10 feet tall.

'**Meteor**' is an EXTREMELY hardy variety worth trying if you can find it.



Prunus x 'Juliet' - Dwarf

Cherry / Edible Shrub. Fragrant white flowers in spring are followed by large, deep red cherries perfect for fresh eating, baking and freezing. Foliage is glossy and green. Upright. Grows 5-10ft tall, 3-4ft wide. Full sun. USDA zone 2

Prunus x 'Romeo' Grows 6-8ft tall, 4-6ft wide.

These two dwarf cherries are the product of a 1990s University of Saskatchewan project to produce higher Brix ratings on easy-to-harvest hardy cherry shrubs. The parentage includes *P. cerasus* and *P. fruticosa*. It is recommended that they be planted 2-3" below grade to provide latent buds in the event of girdling or breakage.

PLUMS

Plums are classified into three groups: European, Japanese, and Native. Early ripening, self-fertile European varieties are preferred. Plums require very little in the way of special management to produce in short-season climates. '**Mount Royal**' and '**Stanley**' are two excellent European varieties. Native **Sierra / Pacific Plum** (*Prunus subcordata*) has inconsistent flavor when eaten fresh but produces well and makes excellent jam.

'**Roxy**' Plum is a seed-grown variety that we originally collected from our landlord's tree when Villager Nursery was adjacent to the Gateway Motel (1949-'99) just east of the existing Safeway shopping center that is built on half of the motel site. It was reported (by Roxy & Azad) to be a cross between the Sierra plum and an ornamental cherry plum (*Prunus cerasifera*). It generally produces well and has flavorful fruit in late summer.

PEACHES

There are several "feral" peaches around Truckee, grown from discarded peach-pits, and I've harvested one or two over the years. None were ripe before destroying frosts. Peaches are relatively hardy trees and have brilliant pink blossoms. Hardy, late-flowering, early-ripening varieties worth a go are 'Reliance' and 'Intrepid'. Nearly all peaches are self-fruitful.

APRICOTS

Apricot blooms are beautiful. Several species of *Prunus* are considered apricot: *P. armeniaca*, *P. brigantina*, *P. mandshurica*, *P. mume*, and *P. sibirica*. Apricots are usually cold-hardy but we have yet to see a substantial crop. Apricots bloom very early, and the most difficult aspect of fruit production in Truckee's short-season high-altitude landscape is the loss of blooms to frost. Choosing varieties of every fruit that is hardy, late-blooming and early-ripening, is essential. Even the hardiest varieties of apricot may never bear fruit in Truckee, but may be worth growing for their flowers alone. Most apricots are somewhat self-fertile. 'Moongold', 'Sungold', Chinese (Mormon) and Manchurian apricot are all worth a try. 'Ouray' (8000 ft, southwest CO) and 'Lehman Caves' (7000 ft. Great Basin National Park, NV) are seed-grown apricots from two high-elevation western locations where we have collected and eaten an abundance of apricot fruit. We've saved and grown the seed into small bush trees that sadly seldom fruit.

NUTS

Black walnuts, butternuts and Turkish filbert will survive at Donner and Lake Tahoe as interesting trees but we have never seen a crop. Indigenous people harvested acorns from native black and huckleberry oak. Both sugar pine and piñon pine have huge edible seeds.

EDIBLE HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS

It seems worth mentioning a few easy-to-grow, hardy and perennial (non woody) veggies and herbs.

Rhubarb (*Rheum* × *hybridum* from *R. rhaponticum* + *R. rhabarbarum* +?) grows with a little care year after year producing more and more leaves with succulent stalks. This plant is seldom eaten by deer or squirrels and is very productive. Some are very red some greenish but they all taste the same. Chinese rhubarb, Da Huang, (*Rheum palmatum*) is a striking hardy ornamental with HUGE leaves. Its roots have been



Pl. 323. *Asperge officinale*. *Asparagus officinalis* L.

used in herbal medicine for millennia.

Garden Asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*), which can take 2 to 3 years to produce but will get better every year, is hardy and amazing. We've found escaped patches growing on Donner Summit. Eat as much fresh as you can and freeze the rest.

Horseradish (*Armoracia rusticana*) is vigorous and outstanding. If you enjoy this herb, plant yourself a patch because when it is fresh it is potent and spectacular. Very aggressive.

Lovage / German Celery (*Levisticum officinale*) grows to 5' tall in clumps several feet across. The tender leaflets have a wonderful mild celery flavor for seasoning, stews, salads, potatoes etc. and can be frozen for use any time of the year. (tastes like "Maggi" seasoning). Eric uses it all the time.

Vigorous Perennial Herbs include catnip, chives, comfrey, lavender, mints, oregano, sage, sorrel, tarragon, thyme. There are many lesser-known medicinal and flavoring herbs that will also thrive in Truckee including valerian, tansy, wormwood, absinthe, yarrow and sweet woodruff.

Villager
nursery inc.

Helping Mountain Gardens Thrive Since 1975
10678 Donner Pass Road
Truckee, California
530.587.0771

