

Fall Harvest....from your Back Yard

One of the frequent calls or inquiries coming into the Extension office is from the individual who wants to grow fruit in Rutherford County. Successful production of fruit in our climate is no easy task, and anyone who tries it may be plagued with pests, disease, and the accompanying poor yields. However, there are a few exceptional native, low-maintenance trees suitable for a backyard grower that hold promise for a fall harvest from the back yard.



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Extension Agent III

The UT Residential and Community Forest Workgroup and Neal Vercler have provided the following list of possibilities:

Paw Paw (*Asimina triloba*) is a medium-sized tree and is the only member of its genus that grows outside of the tropics. When they ripen in September, the yellow-green fruit, roughly the size of an avocado, has a flavor similar to a banana. The fruit can be eaten fresh or used to make bread or ice cream. You will need more than one tree since they do not self-pollinate-- Paw Paw does like to form thickets through root sprouting. Also, you'll have to beat the deer to the ripe fruit.

Pecan (*Carya illinoensis*), well placed, can provide an abundance of shade during our hot summers and provide a plethora of edible nuts during the fall. Placing an old bed sheet on the ground beneath the tree in mid-October into November is a nice passive way to gather your fill. While it does take a little effort to crack each nut, the sweet, buttery flavor makes it worth it. Just remember, pecans need plenty of space to grow since they can get exceptionally large and have deep root systems.

Anyone who has bitten into an unripened Persimmon knows the feeling of their body trying to swallow its own face. Until the American Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) experiences a frost, the high tannin content makes the fruit highly astringent. However, those who have had a soft, ripe persimmon know how special they are. On top of the exceptional flavor, the tree also has amazing fall color and a strikingly corky bark. Remember, only the female trees will produce fruit and the fruit can be messy when they drop. It may be wise to place the tree where the mess won't be a problem.

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For the person who may enjoy less familiar fruit options, the Paw Paw, Pecan, and persimmon are great native trees with potential to fill multiple roles in the urban environment. No tree is zero-maintenance, but these hardy natives can sure come close. Please call your local Rutherford County UT/TSU Extension office at 615-898-7710 or visit our website at Rutherford.tennessee.edu