

With fruit plants, sometimes you need two to help pollinate

Planning to plant a single fruit-producing tree, shrub or vine this spring may not be enough – even for gardens with ideal growing sites.

Some fruit-producing plants are called “self-pollinating” – although bees usually do the actual pollen-carrying and the plants may prefer not being a “lonely only.” Nonetheless, a self-pollinator can serve as its own source for the pollen it needs to produce fruit. So, home gardeners only have to grow one plant, said Ward Upham, horticulturist with Kansas State University Research and Extension.

In contrast, other fruit-producing trees, shrubs, brambles and the like require a pollen source that’s a second cultivar – a different variety that produces the same general species of fruit. Among these are the cultivars that produce pears, blueberries and elderberries.

“You’ve got to remember that when planning what to buy. Otherwise, you may be awfully disappointed,” Upham said. “A Fuji apple tree, for example, can’t pollinate another Fuji and enable it to set fruit. To produce, a Fuji needs a different variety nearby – one that blooms at about the same time, such as the Braeburn apple.”

Nursery catalogs often recommend varieties to use as pollinizers or include compatibility charts. University of Missouri Extension also provides charts for most apple varieties, Japanese plums and most sweet cherries in

its “Pollinating Fruit Crops” guide at extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/agguides/hort/g06001.pdf.

Although apricots will produce fruit without a pollinator, a second variety helps insure larger crops. Just one plant is adequate, however, for both pollination and fruit development with the Golden Delicious apple, blackberry, tart (pie) cherry, Stella sweet cherry, currant, gooseberry, grape, peach, European plum, nectarine, raspberry and strawberry.

“Even so, when they’re growing fruits that don’t need one, some gardeners still will plant a second cultivar. They’ve found that many of our self-contained plants will also cross-pollinate whenever they can. These gardeners believe providing for that helps keep self-pollinators from becoming too inbred,” Upham said.

Gardeners who’ve already planted a single cultivar that truly requires a pollinator can fool Mother Nature, though, he added: “Find another gardener who’s growing a different cultivar of the same species. The two of you can then exchange bouquets of blossoms every two to three days through prime bloom time. You’ll need to place each new bouquet in a container of water and hang it on the sunny side of your tree. Bees will visit the bouquets’ flowers and take pollen from there to flowers in the tree.”

Community effort



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Volunteers at the Community Garden planted numerous rows of vegetables last year on the donated land at the K-State Research Station.

Fruit tree pests can mean a lot of work for gardeners

Except for peaches, which often live just 10 to 12 years, fruit trees can be a long-term investment. In most cases, they’re also a good-size commitment – one that gardeners should consider carefully before buying, said Ward Upham, horticulturist with Kansas State University Research and Extension.

“Even if you buy the most pest-resistant varieties available, fruit trees can and probably will have insect and disease problems in Kansas. Without your providing some kind of help, the best you can hope for is that the tree will produce less-than-perfect or no fruit. The worst is that the tree will suffer and may die,” Upham said.

He suggests gardeners investigate what help might include before deciding what they’d like to grow.

K-State has a publication called “Fruit Pest Control for Home Gardens” that outlines the common pests of Kansas’ commonly grown fruiting plants. It explains the organic, chemical, and/or other controls that can keep those pests in line – if applied correctly, on time, and often enough. The publication is available at local K-State Research and Extension offices, as well as online at www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/hort2/c592.pdf.

“If you’ve paid much attention to old homesteads, you’ve probably discovered that pears are tough and one of the few trees that can survive on their own for a while. They do

need pest controls for best production. To produce, they also need access to pollen from another pear variety. If it matters to you, though, the odds for getting some good fruit without spraying are much better for pears than they are for apples,” Upham said.

Apple growers also must plant at least two compatible varieties to get fruit. They also may need to spray those trees in March to control scale and mites. From April through about two weeks before harvest, however, they’ll typically have to spray to control pests every two weeks or so, the horticulturist said.

“Sweet cherries (such as Bing) aren’t well-adapted to Kansas,” Upham said. “But sour or pie cherries are. Plus, sour cherries only need one tree for fruit. For some Kansans, though, the biggest bonus is that sour cherry crops reach maturity in June. So, their trees need relatively few sprays.”

Gardeners can get peaches from a single tree. Apricots produce best with two varieties. Due to late frosts, however, neither stone-fruit tree is likely to produce every year. In fact, apricots tend to provide fruit every five to 10 years in Kansas. Still, both trees require regular help with damaging, if not killing pests, he said.

For best varieties, see www.hfrr.ksu.edu/DesktopModules/ViewDocument.aspx?DocumentID=2814.

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