

In the days of white clapboard houses and quietly moving rocking chairs, almost every backyard had an apple tree. Just a quick listing of the old-world varieties evokes images of picket fences, washboard-like roads, and knickers--names such as Black Gilliflower, Northern Spy, Peck's Pleasant, Maiden's Blush, and Westfield Seek-No-Further. In this day of agribusiness, streamlined production methods have made dabbling in varieties unprofitable. Today our choices are limited. Gone are many of the backyard favorites offering hundreds of shapes, colors, and delicious flavors.

But with home gardening on the increase, amateur growers by the thousands are enjoying the delights of freshly picked fruits and nuts. Peaches, plums, pears, quince, cherries, blueberries, and strawberries are popping up all over suburban United States. The more venturesome are trying their hand at unusual fruits, such as gooseberries and elderberries, or are putting out a nut tree or two.

Mention apple growing to most gardeners and immediately a vision of acres and acres of gently sloping orchards will come to mind. But with modern grafting techniques, dwarf varieties are available. And fruit trees don't have to be tucked away in a weedy corner. Attractive blossoms, graceful growth, and colorful fruit make fruit trees ideal for landscaping.

Before you start a miniature orchard, though, remember that growing fruit will require a little extra time if your efforts are to be successful. Fruit trees need some special care. Bugs, birds, and cold temperatures will threaten. But if you possess a passion for living things and can spare a few hours a week, you can grow delicious, tree- and vine-ripened fruit.