

FRUITS

The number of fruits that can be grown in small gardens has increased dramatically with the widespread availability of plants grafted onto dwarfing rootstock and those specifically bred to be small. Even mangos, mulberries, pears and avocados, which usually mature to be large trees, can now be bought as dwarf plants. This means they are very suited to growing in pots or in many small spots around the garden. There is no longer any excuse that you ‘don’t have room’ to grow fruit. If you have a garden of any size, or a balcony, verandah or rooftop, you can grow fruit.

The fruits I have chosen to describe offer a wide variety of choices to suit most locations in the garden, sun or shade, and most climates. If you are very short on space, try growing trees espalier-style on a lattice, or choose plants that have a naturally climbing habit and grow them against a fence or on a specially constructed arbour.

Fruits that are generally considered to be suited to tropical or subtropical areas will grow in temperate locations if a suitable frost-free microclimate is available, but they might never produce as well as they would in their preferred habitat. People with large gardens might have space to experiment with plants outside their climate zone; those with small gardens will find that choosing plants suited

to their climate ensures greater productivity, and usually less maintenance.

Maximise your space efficiency by growing smaller bushes that prefer dappled shade in pots under the canopy of larger trees and encouraging climbing plants to take up vertical space. Plant fruits that require more care and frequent harvesting, such as strawberries, closer to the house.

If you have space for a designated ‘orchard’, try growing green manure crops under the trees and mowing the crop to both mulch and fertilise the fruit trees. Poultry pecking around the ground in the orchard will help control pests and fertilise the trees. Do make sure they cannot scratch around the base of the trees and cause root damage, or even scratch out young plants.

Acerola

Malpighia glabra

Also commonly called Barbados cherry, the acerola is a plant for tropical and subtropical areas. Young plants are frost-tender, but when mature they tolerate colder temperatures. Make sure newly planted acerolas have frost and wind protection. Mulch well to conserve soil moisture and fertilise with decomposed