

# Growing Pears in the Home Landscape

by Rebecca L. Jordi

Homeowners often ask me to recommend flowering trees to plant in their home landscapes. They are thinking of trees similar to crepe myrtle, dogwood or Bradford pear. I am rethinking my pat answer to start including some edible tree varieties such as pear. The beauty of having these flowering trees in the landscape is the lovely spring flowers which attract bees with the additional bonus of providing fruit in the fall. What more could you ask of a tree?

One of the easiest trees to start planting would be a pear tree. Pear trees, like many other fruit trees now grown around the world, originated in central Asia. This relative of the apple is propagated and managed in a very similar manner, but is in some ways easier to grow than apples. Whereas apples can sometimes be pestered by a host of insects and diseases, pears are relatively trouble-free. One other thing to remember – pear trees are deciduous therefore in the fall they will drop their leaves just like crepe myrtle and dogwood.

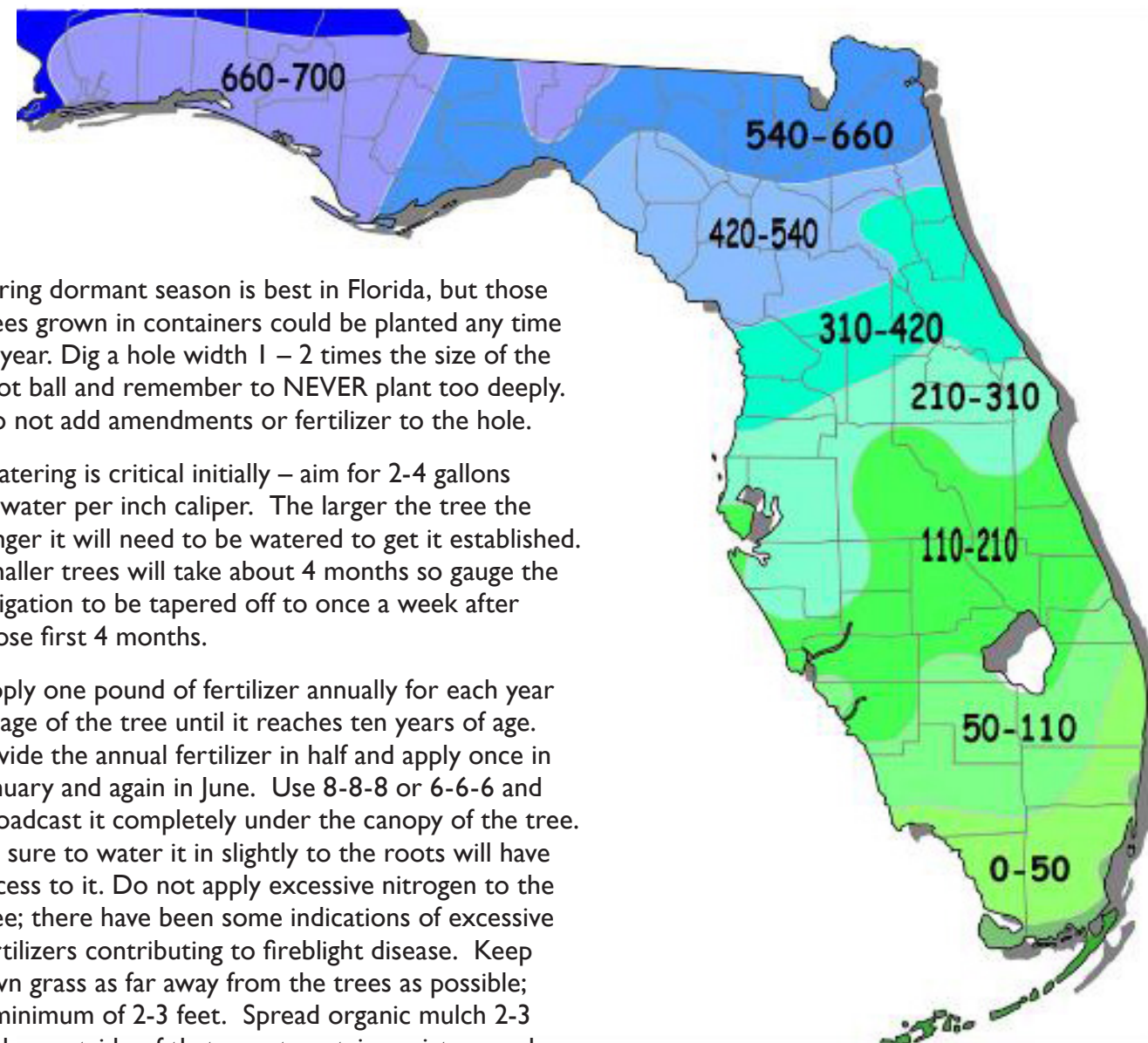
The ability to be successful in producing a strong and productive pear tree starts with selecting the appropriate variety or cultivar. Let's start with eliminating the ones we know will not grow here in Florida – Bosc, D'Anjou, Red D'Anjou, and Winter Nelis. All these require over 700 chill hours and the majority of Florida does not receive enough cold time. Chill hours simply means the number of hours the tree must go into dormancy in order to produce fruit. There is a small sliver in the northern Florida Panhandle which might be able to achieve enough



cold but the rest of Florida is just too warm. Bartlett pears require one of the trees listed above as a tree pollinator so we need to eliminate it too. I know what you are thinking – well what pears are left? There are plenty of other good pear choices.

Pears are typically grown from just south of Central Florida to North Florida. "Flordahome", "Hood", and "Pineapple" are the only cultivars recommended for growing in Central Florida. These three pear trees produce fruit early in the season. All of the above pears are suitable for North Florida but there are several others: "Baldwin", "Carnes", "Kieffer", "Orient", and "Tenn". Although some of these varieties are self-fruitful they will benefit from having a different cultivar as a pollinator and Baldwin is a good, all around strong choice.

After selecting the perfect cultivar or variety plant the pear tree in a sunny, well-drained area. Ideally, soil should be slightly acidic (6.0 -6.5 pH). Pear leaves will show yellowing or slight iron deficiency in alkaline soils. Allow for good air circulation therefore allow room for mature height and spread. Planting



during dormant season is best in Florida, but those trees grown in containers could be planted any time of year. Dig a hole width 1 – 2 times the size of the root ball and remember to NEVER plant too deeply. Do not add amendments or fertilizer to the hole.

Watering is critical initially – aim for 2-4 gallons of water per inch caliper. The larger the tree the longer it will need to be watered to get it established. Smaller trees will take about 4 months so gauge the irrigation to be tapered off to once a week after those first 4 months.

Apply one pound of fertilizer annually for each year of age of the tree until it reaches ten years of age. Divide the annual fertilizer in half and apply once in January and again in June. Use 8-8-8 or 6-6-6 and broadcast it completely under the canopy of the tree. Be sure to water it in slightly to the roots will have access to it. Do not apply excessive nitrogen to the tree; there have been some indications of excessive fertilizers contributing to fireblight disease. Keep lawn grass as far away from the trees as possible; a minimum of 2-3 feet. Spread organic mulch 2-3 inches outside of that area to retain moisture and reduce the potential for weeds.

Planting pears from seed is risky as they will not necessarily have the same characteristics of the parent plant. It is better to purchase a pear grafted onto a reliable rootstock.

Most pears will ripen as they age but pick them just before ripening and store at room temperature.

Pears are pruned for two reasons: to remove diseased or dead wood and to train or shape the tree. Shaping the tree into a modified, single leader will allow the tree to spread and make fruit picking easier.

The most serious disease of pears is fireblight which is caused by a bacterium transmitted by pollinators or pruning shears. The disease is highly contagious and can spread from tree to tree destroying blossoms, fruit and potentially the entire tree. If detected early enough, pruning 8 -10 inches below the infected site may help manage the disease. Be sure to destroy any diseased parts by burning or placing them in a trash bag and throwing them away. Occasionally, the tree will show fungal leaf spots which can be easily managed with a fungal spray as the tree is beginning to leaf out. Be sure to alternate the types of fungicides used to avoid resistance.

## Cultivars of Pear Trees

**CARNES** – small tree, hard eating pear, and fruit is yellow-green when ripe. Carnes blooms in March with fruit ripening in late July. It requires one of the early blooming varieties as a pollinator.

**FLORDAHOME** - sweet, smooth-textured, juicy, flavorful. Early blooming and harvest July/August. Chill time less than 400 hours. Flordahome is partly self-fruitful. Fruit is good for eating.

**PINEAPPLE** – hard, gritty texture to the flesh making it a good candidate for cooking, making pear crisp, and pear butters. It generally does not soften or ripen well after picking so leave it on the tree as long as possible. 200 chill hours. Fruit is slightly acid with a mild pineapple taste.

**TENN** - small, sweet pears great for dessert. Spring bloomer with pears ripening in early fall. Fruit are greenish-yellow with a red blush. Requires 150-450 chill hours.

**HOOD** – Good pollinator with Flordahome. Large, early season fruit has yellow-green skin and sweet, mild-flavored flesh. Resistant to fireblight. 100-200 chill hours. Good for eating fresh or canning.

**KEIFFER** - Medium to large late season fruit for canning and cooking. Coarse texture. Resists fire blight. 200-300 chill hours. Self-fruitful.

**ORIENT** - Fire blight resistant. Beautiful, large, nearly round fruits with shiny yellow skin and red blush. Flesh firm texture juicy with mild flavor, used mainly for canning. Large, vigorous tree. 350 chill hours.



TENN PEAR



CARNES PEAR FLOWER