

Portstone

GARDEN CENTRE

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A u g u s t

STONEFRUIT in the shops are often very disappointing in their flavour and floury texture, so it makes sense that if you are thinking of planting a tree then think stonefruit.

PEACHES to me should be so juicy that it runs down your fingers when you eat them. I remember them as a child, the clean white flesh making a sugary mess of my face and hands. Two such peaches are Wiggins and April White. Wiggins is an old variety with large fruit that are sweet and juicy, with soft, melting white flesh. It is a freestone, with superb flavour and good disease resistance. It crops early in January. April White is also a large white, juicy fruit, but has a firmer, crisp flesh and attractive pink blush. It crops heavily in late March and has a high resistance to leaf curl. Black Boy is a medium size fruit with dark furry skin and soft, rich purplish red veined fruit. It's colourful and very flavoursome. Good for bottling. Matures late season. Golden Queen is a classic for bottling. A clingstone variety with firm deep orange flesh. Matures in March.

NECTARINES also taste so much better when fully tree ripened. Red Gold is a large, proven late season nectarine with a sweet flavour, rivalling some peach varieties. Deep red skin with gold blush and a deep yellow flesh that separates easily from the stone. Goldmine is an old variety which is very productive. It's a medium size fruit with white juicy flesh.

DWARF PEACHES and **NECTARINES** are real cuties with their big round head on a short sturdy trunk. They look great in a pot or half wine barrel. Their growth can get so prolific sometimes, that they need to be thinned out to allow air flow and more room for the fruit to develop. The fruit is at the right height for children to pick easily.

PLUMS are the easiest stonefruit to grow in the home garden, as prolific crops of very good quality fruit can be produced with very little effort. Only a few diseases affect plum trees, so a very basic organic spray programme will keep the tree healthy and productive.

GOOSEBERRIES are one of the few edible crops that will thrive in light shade rather than needing full sun like so many other edibles. They like cool, moist conditions with protection from late frost and are not fussy about soil type so long as it isn't waterlogged or salty. The bush should start bearing fruit in the first two or three years so it is important in that time to develop the framework you are aiming for. They can be grown as a true bush with a number of shoots arising from the soil, or they can be trained as a standard with a low trunk and the first branches at about 30cm up. Alternatively, the shoots can be trained to a fan shape and espaliered along a fence. The bushes get to about a metre high which makes them ideal for a low prickly hedge that will certainly deter intruders. Invicta has large flavourful, green berries that are excellent for pies and jam, while Pax is a dark red when fully ripe and lovely eaten fresh. When mature, the bush is virtually spineless. Monarch is a compact heavy cropping plant, not as thorny as Invicta. The large green fruit that stay on the bush for about three weeks are good for pies, preserves, etc. Then the berries ripen and turn red at which point they are better for eating fresh or making wine. There's so much fun to be had from gardening!

Time now to plant strawberries, sprout potatoes and sow broad beans