



# Times-News

## Backyard Fruit Benefits: Investing in Your Future in Your Backyard

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ECO NOTES



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Everyone knows that the cultural history of WNC is connected to the agricultural traditions that began with the Cherokee. Their ag practices brought us the first apple and peach orchards as well as hundreds of ways to use native chestnuts from flour to medicine to roasting. But the benefits of raising heritage fruit trees go further than preserving a slice of WNC history. Raising backyard fruit, both heritage and hybrid, offer great environmental, economic and health benefits.

### Investment in backyard fruit

People spend thousands of dollars each year to invest in their health and wellness. A bottle of vitamins lasts 30-60 days and cost the price of a fruit tree or often more, yet fruit trees offer substantial financial and health benefits. One apple, peach or chestnut tree can live 150 or more years, produce 150-300 pounds of fruit a year when its mature, offering thousands of dollars in dividends with a small initial investment. Annuals such as a vegetables grown in an edible garden require constant investment every year, but perennials such as fruit and nut trees require little human or monetary expense other than regular maintenance (and easy on the fertilizer).

### Extra Health benefits

The average fruit travels 1600 miles from tree to table. Often picked too early to reach its full nutritional potential, transported fruit are a poor substitute for local fruit and there's nothing more local than your own backyard. Most fruit varieties are chosen for their shipping, packing and cosmetic appeal. How many people would choose food for its ability to taste like a fedex package? But isn't that what we do when we buy fruit at a local grocery store?

Chestnuts, for instance, are a great source of carbohydrates, keep longer than many nuts and have the lowest fat content of the major nuts. The phytonutrients in apples can help you regulate your blood sugar. Recent research has shown that intake of apples in their whole food form can significantly lower many of our blood fats. Scientists have recently shown that important health benefits of apples may stem from their impact on bacteria in the digestive tract. Peaches are the Chinese symbol for immortality and are easily digested. They are great for skin health and have a great laxative and diuretic quality and are low in calories.

### Environmental benefits

When we consider the carbon footprint of the food we eat, backyard fruit and nuts are measured in food feet instead of food miles. A host of studies indicate that for every calorie of food we get from the average grocery fruit, we expend a whopping 15 calories of fossil fuel in transportation, refrigeration, and production costs. You do the world a big favor when you grow your own. Plants scrub CO2 from the air and maintain it in their biomass. Apple trees capture CO2 from the air, their nectar and pollen are an important source for native pollinators. They are a great habitat for bird nesting which helps with pest control and they are a great companion plant with horseradish. Chickens are great companions for apple trees since they keep the pest population down, minimize weed populations and contribute valuable manure.

ECO's Heritage Apple and Peach and Chestnut Tree sale is winding down quickly. If you wish to place an order before we're sold out, you may order online at [www.eco-wnc.org](http://www.eco-wnc.org) or contact the ECO office at 692-0385. ECO has planned a workshop about the value of backyard gardening by one of the leading permaculture experts in the region, Chuck Marsh. His workshop is titled, "Backyard Economics- Unleashing the Productive Potential of your Home Landscape." The workshop will be held on Wednesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> at 6:30 at the ECO Conference Room. Preregistration is required and there is a \$15 suggested donation. To register contact ECO at 692-0283 or at [www.eco-wnc.org](http://www.eco-wnc.org).

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