

Tom's Top 21

Reliable, proven selections for the Southwestern fruit gardener.

Tom's picks were selected for their ability to produce quality fruit in southern California's coastal and inland valleys, as well as in Arizona and California lower deserts where winter time chill hours are less than 500 per year. Consideration was also given to varieties that will successively ripen throughout the summer. A planting of the following selections would be expected to produce flavorful, quality stone and pome fruits from mid-May through October.



Apple

Dorsett Golden – A fond selection from the Bahamas, Dorsett is thought to be the lowest chill apple selection in production to date, needing less than 100 chill hours for successful production.



This bright yellow blushed reddish pink fruit has a white flesh with firm texture and excellent quality. It's most popular as a fresh fruit but also works well for cooking, canning and freezing. Dorsett can be stored for three months after harvest. It's self-fruitful and also works well as a pollenizer for other early season apples, like Anna. Dorsett harvests from June through July in the Southwest and often produces a second smaller crop in late summer.

Apple

Fuji – Imported from Japan in the 1960's Fuji is a cross between Ralls Janet and Delicious. Once thought to require high chill, Fuji has proven itself as a reliable producer throughout the low-chill Southwest. We now rate it at less than 500 chill hours and for all practical purposes it should be considered in the 200 to 400 hour range. Fuji's exterior color is a lackluster yellowish green with a blush of orange. Its interior color is a creamy orange yellow with a wonderful crispy, crunchy sweet flavor so don't let its dull exterior fool you. Fuji has fast become one of the most popular apples varieties in the world. Fuji is self-fruitful and is also a recommended pollenizer for other mid season apple varieties. Its ripening in the Southwest is from late August through October. Fuji is also an excellent keeper and can maintain good quality for more than six months.

Apple

Pink Lady® – aka "Cripps Pink" - A cross between Golden Delicious and Lady Williams from Western Australia. With a chilling requirement similar to Fuji at 200 to 400 hours, Pink Lady® has proven itself throughout the Southwest from the cool coastal zones to the hottest deserts. Its exterior color is a striking bright reddish-pink over green with a fine-grained white flesh that's clean, crisp, flavorful and resists browning. Pink Lady® is self-fruitful and harvests from early September through the fall season, often holding on the tree until winter. Its also a good keeper, storing for six months or more.

Aprium®

Flavor Delight – An Aprium® is a Plum-Apricot hybrid that favors the characteristic of its Apricot parent. Flavor Delight was developed by Zaiger Genetics of Modesto, CA. It has a low chilling requirement of less than 300 hours. Both the tree character and fruit resemble apricot with a distinctive flavor and texture all its own, with high taste test scores – one of the most flavorful early season fruits. It ripens in the Southwest from mid-May through June and is self-fruitful but produces better when cross-pollinated by another apricot. With very little alternate bearing, it produces reliably in most years.



Aprium®

Cot-N-Candy – An exiting new white Apricot - Plum hybrid from Zaigers. Cot-N-Candy favors its Apricot parent producing an incredibly flavored, sweet and juicy white fleshed Cot style fruit, with high taste test scores and consistent quality. It has an estimated chill hour requirement of less than 400 hours. It's self-fruitful, ripens late June to mid July, and aids as a cross pollenizer for other Aprium® and Apricot varieties. A Zaiger introduction, Sure to become a favorite in your fruit garden.

Cherry

Minnie Royal – Southwestern fruit gardeners can finally celebrate the introductions of two new very low chill sweet cherries. Minnie Royal and its companion Royal Lee have proven themselves as low chill adaptable, in fact they may not require any chill at all. Minni Royal is a medium to large size red cherry with firm texture and superior flavor. Fruit begins to ripen in early May and holds well on the tree into June. The tree is very productive and sets heavy crops in southern California. We estimate chill requirement at 200 to 300 hours but mine has produced with less than 100 hours. Zaiger introduction, Pollenized by Royal Lee.



Cherry

Royal Lee – The pollenizing companion to Minnie Royal, the Royal Lee ripens about one week later and holds well on the tree until mid June. Royal Lee is a medium sized red to dark red sweet cherry with a very firm texture and a crunch. Flavor is rated as excellent. Again an estimated chill requirement of 200 to 300 hours but has proven itself fruitful with even less. A Zaiger introduction, Pollenized by Minni Royal.

Nectarine

Arctic Star – Another important Zaiger introduction, Arctic Star has a low chilling requirement of less than 300 hours. It has an exceptionally dark red exterior color and a snow white interior flesh. Arctic Star is the earliest to ripen of the new, low acid, super sweet, white nectarines. Its harvest season is June in the Southwest. It's self-fruitful and rates high in our early summer taste tests. A tree ripened Arctic Star is quite possibly one of the best things to ever harvest in early summer.

Nectarine

Double Delight – Another Zaiger introduction, Double Delight has a chilling requirement of less than 400 hours. Originally thought to be higher chill, it has proven itself to be a heavy producer in southern California and is consistently one of the best flavored yellow flesh nectarines in our taste tests. It has an unusually rich flavor and aromatic fragrance. What really sets this variety off is its eye appeal in the spring. It puts out a beautiful display of showy double pink flowers. Double Delight is self-fruitful and freestone and ripens through July.



Nectarine

Snow Queen – A longtime favorite of mine and one of the first trees I planted back in the late 1970's. Snow Queen has a true old fashioned Anderson style Nectarine flavor. Not sub-acid like many white Nectarines but a true sugar to acid balance. A long time taste test winner with a low chill requirement of 200 to 300 hours. Fruit ripens late June to early July. The only set back to Snow Queen is some susceptibility to skin cracking also known as 'cat facing'. This phenomenon only effects a small percentage of the crop and with such great flavor I can live with a little cracked fruit. Snow Queen is self-fruitful and was introduced by Armstrong Nurseries of Ontario, CA. in 1975.

Necta-Plum®

Spice Zee – The first true Necta-Plum® released by Zaiger hybrids. In my personal opinion Spice Zee is the most important fruit tree introduction of the last 20 years. It has everything going for it. The tree itself is beautiful with a bold purplish - pink flower and long glossy red leaves turning to dark reddish green in summer. A true edible ornamental Spice Zee could be worked into any landscape as a contrast specimen. The tree is very productive the fruit is large, dark maroon with a mottled red and white flesh that melts in your mouth. The seed is freestone and the flavor is unparalleled with recognizable traits of both nectarine and plum. Spice Zee is self-fruitful with a low chill requirement of 200 to 300 hours and is also very high chill adaptable. A Zaiger introduction.



Peach

August Pride – A Zaiger introduction, which requires less than 300 chill hours. August Pride is a large size, all-purpose yellow freestone peach. Good for fresh fruit, preserving, baking and dehydrating. Sweet, aromatic and rich flavor, it is considered one of the best. It ripens late July through August in the Southwest. For three months of yellow freestone peaches consider planting May Pride, Eva's Pride, Mid Pride and August Pride together in one hole.

Peach

Donut (Stark Saturn) - Also called "Saucer" or "Peento", this unique flat shaped peach with a sunken center is all the rage. Thought by many to be of recent origin, this variety has actually been in cultivation for more than 400 years. Donut has a low chilling requirement of less than 300 hours and seems to produce just as well under high chill conditions as it does in low chill. Its white fleshed, freestone fruit has a sweet, mild flavor with a hint of almond. It's self-fruitful and ripens from late June through July in the Southwest. Also look for Peach Sweet Bagel a yellow fleshed peento-style peach, which ripens through August.



Peach

Eva's Pride – This delicious, fine flavored large peach, has a very low chilling requirement of 100 to 200 hours. The yellow fleshed freestone fruit has a unique red mottle to its interior. Eva's Pride is self-fruitful and a heavy producer with a harvest season beginning in late May and extending through late June in the Southwest. Fresh tree ripened Eva's Pride has a unique zing to its flavor that also holds true when dehydrated. Also great for preserves and pies. This is one of those (if I was only going to plant one peach) varieties. Oh yes, it's a Zaiger!

Peach

Mid Pride – Considered the best yellow freestone peach for warm winter climates of southern California, Phoenix Arizona, Houston Texas and the S.F. bay area. Also adaptable to higher chill climates. Beautiful double pink flower is followed by a July harvest of large yellow flavorful, freestone Peaches. Great for fresh eating, canning and pies. With Eva's, Mid and August Pride you can successfully harvest Peaches for almost three months. Self-fruitful with a low chilling requirement of 250 hours or less. Zaiger introduction.



Peach

Red Baron – This fruiting and flowering peach displays a beautiful double red flower color. An old time favorite in Arizona, California and Texas Red Baron would be a spectacular ornamental even if it didn't produce fruit. (Fortunately for all us fruit eaters, it does!) Red Baron is low chill rated at 200 to 300 hours and produces a large, juicy, richly flavored yellow freestone fruit. Harvest season is mid July to early August and it's self-fruitful. Plant it together with Saturn peach for a beautiful showing of double red and pink flowers and fruit for six weeks.

Plum

Burgundy – This Japanese-type plum is rated at 150 to 300 chill hours. Burgundy's maroon colored skin and deep red, wine-colored flesh have always been rated high for visual appeal. Its sweet mild flavor has it scoring high in our taste tests on a regular basis. Burgundy has no tartness and is self-fruitful. It's also considered to be one of the best cross pollinators for other Japanese plums and Pluots®. Burgundy's season is from mid July and often extends through September. It's a proven producer throughout the Southwest and if I was only planting one plum, it would be Burgundy.



Pluot®

Emerald Drop – A medium to large size fruit with bright green skin and yellow orange flesh that scores consistently high taste test scores. Prolonged harvest from mid July through August and sometimes into early September. Early harvest is firm and crunchy the longer it hangs the tastier it gets with a melt in your mouth sweet honey flavor. Estimated chill requirement of 400 hours or less. Tree bears reliably and heavy. Pollenized by Splash, other Pluots® or Japanese Plums. Zaiger introduction.



Pluot®

Flavor Grenade – Pluots® are plum-apricot hybrids, favoring the plum parentage. Flavor Grenade is a recent introduction from Zaiger. Originally thought to be high chill, Flavor Grenade could possibly be one of the most widely adaptable Pluots® to date, showing precocity and productiveness from the low chill Southwest to severe winter areas, such as northern Idaho and Montana. Flavor Grenade's chill requirement is not known for sure, but is probably in the 200 to 300 hour range. This elongated green fruit, bears a red blush. Crisp texture and explosive flavor. It's a high scoring taste test winner. Best when pollinated with Burgundy plum or another Japanese plum or Pluot®. Ripens mid August and holds on the tree until October.



Pluot®

Flavor King – Another highly adaptable Pluot® variety with a chill requirement of 400 hours or less. Flavor King has a reddish purple skin and crimson flesh with unique sweet and spicy flavor and a sensational bouquet. Pollination can be with Burgundy plum or another Japanese plum or Pluot®. It ripens August to September. Plant Flavor King with Flavor Grenade, Beauty Plum and Burgundy Plum for good crosspollination and fruit from June to October. A Zaiger introduction.



Pluot®

Splash – Small to medium sized red-orange colored fruit with very sweet orange flesh. Consistently high taste test scores. Round to heart shaped fruit is excellent eaten fresh, dried or in desserts. Upright tree sets large crops once established. Estimated chill requirement of 400 hours or less. Pollenized by Emerald Drop, other Pluots or Japanese Plums. A Zaiger introduction.

A chill hour is considered to be those hours in late fall or early winter below 45°. We like to consider low chill in southern California to be five hundred hours or less.

Chill hours are definitely more important in the late fall and early winter when trees are going into dormancy, rather than, say mid to late winter, when the trees are beginning to push and break dormancy. In southern California and the lower deserts of Arizona, our winters can be short, often times lasting less than two months. So it's very important that we choose varieties that are "low chill".

Tom's career in the nursery industry started in 1972 when a neighbor offered him a position working with 5th Avenue Nursery in Rowland Heights, California. Tom's first responsibilities were: watering, weeding and loading cars. Tom used to ride his skateboard to work after school.

In 1976 Tom went to work for Nogales Nursery & landscape Co. as assistant manager and also worked part time at landscape installation and propagation in their small greenhouse.

Tom accepted a position with Armstrong Nurseries in Ontario, California in 1978. There he worked with the wholesale division during the week and retail on weekends. It was at this point, being able to work with prominent hybridizers and propagators of the time, Tom realized his real interest was in growing.

A few years later, in 1981, Tom was offered and accepted a general manager's position with La Verne Nursery in San Dimas, California. La Verne Nursery specialized in avocado, citrus, sub-tropical and deciduous fruits and grafted ornamentals. Tom felt that being able to work with Dieter Lodder for twenty years was both an honor and an education he couldn't buy.



In 2001, Tom was offered the position of Southwestern sales manager with Dave Wilson Nursery of Hickman, California. The nursery specializes in fruit, nut and shade trees. Although Tom now spends most of his time in sales and marketing, he still looks forward to working with propagation, production and grading crews. Along the way, Tom came to realize that you just can't take the farmer out of the field.

Some of the additional opportunities while working at Dave Wilson Nursery Tom has come to appreciate are: a very media friendly company, which includes television, radio, magazine, newspaper and lectures. In recent years, Tom has done television work with HGTV Gardening by the Yard, DIY Weekend Gardner, California Country and California's Heartland. Tom has also given radio interviews and call in shows with The Garden Compass Radio Network, KRLA Home Wizards and KFBK, KSTE Get Growing with Farmer Fred Hoffman. Also an accomplished writer, Tom has provided insightful articles for Garden Compass Magazine, Sunset, Westways, Los Angeles Times, and Orange County Register as well as several other newspapers and periodicals. Tom's lectures with a variety of topics on fruit growing throughout the western United States, to such audiences as: UC Master Gardeners, California Rare Fruit Growers, The Huntington, Descanso Gardens, The Los Angeles Arboretum and dozens of garden clubs and horticultural societies.