

Growing Edible Arizona Forests, An Illustrated Guide

Excerpt from *leafnetworkaz.org*

Edible Tree Guide

LEARN Values, Benefits and Characteristics

- Native and nonnative trees

Native and nonnative edible trees

Native and nonnative edible trees provide food with nutritious proteins, vitamins and minerals. Planting a balance of native and nonnative species will help create a diverse, resilient food forest.

Native edible trees are those that occur naturally in Arizona regions or ecosystems without the need for human care. They are adapted to the rainfall patterns, temperatures, local climates and microclimates around Arizona and have supported Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. We use the term broadly to include plants native to the greater Southwest and the Sonoran Desert of Mexico.

Nonnative edible trees have been introduced to Arizona from regions around the world. With sufficient water, many nonnative edible trees can be well adapted to local Arizona conditions.

Native and nonnative edible trees offer a variety of different foods, including fruits, nuts, berries, pods, seeds, leaves and flowers that are nutritious and enhance the culinary and taste experiences of a community. Some trees provide food resources to eat throughout the year, and others have seasonal fruits and nuts that can be eaten fresh or can be harvested, processed and stored as long-term food sources.

Many native trees require less water, fewer nutrient inputs, and less care over their lifespans than nonnative trees, but they may not be familiar to people as everyday food sources. Nonnative edible trees often require more water, more nutrient inputs, and more pruning and care.



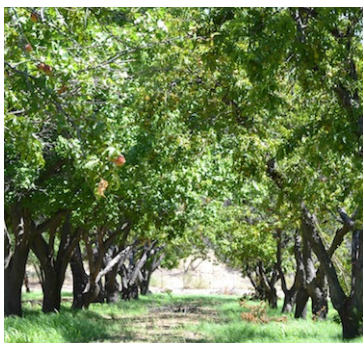
NATIVE MESQUITE TREES AND PODS



NATIVE JUNIPER TREES AND BERRIES



NONNATIVE GRAPEFRUIT TREE AND FRUITS



NONNATIVE MIXED TREES AND APPLES



Nonnative trees should be selected carefully so the varieties and types of trees are well suited for the site and are likely to produce well. As you learn more about the many edible trees in Arizona, you can choose a good balance between low-resource-using native edibles and nonnative edible trees that yield more familiar fruits. Native trees can be inter-planted with nonnative trees to provide shade, frost protection, and wildlife habitat and to balance the water needs of your food forest.

Benefits of Native Trees

- Low or medium water-use trees; some can thrive on rainfall alone once established
- Provide tasty, nutritious fruits, pods, seeds and flowers
- Resistant to many diseases
- Tolerant of temperature extremes, drought and poor soils
- Require less care throughout the tree's lifespan
- Can be planted as windbreaks or sun blocks to protect more sensitive trees
- Culturally and historically significant food sources for Native Americans for thousands of years
- Attract birds, insects, butterflies, bats and other wildlife that increase diversity and may eat tree pests

Benefits of Nonnative Trees

- Provide abundant food resources when placed correctly and well watered
- Produce fruit and nuts that are easily recognized, harvested, and prepared – many can be eaten fresh from the tree
- The fruits, nuts and berries are delicious
- Many have cultural and historical significance to Arizonans



NATIVE PALO VERDE



NATIVE OAK



NONNATIVE FIG



NONNATIVE ORANGE