YARDS
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GARDENS

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BACKYARD FILBERT PRODUCTION

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A home-grown supply of filberts for roasting or baking may be attractive. In some ways, growing filberts may make more sense than most fruit trees because less pruning is required, fewer sprays are needed, time of harvest is less critical, and the nuts are less perishable than fruit crops. Filbert trees begin bearing three to four years after planting, but need about seven years to reach significant production.

Filbert trees are not cold hardy and therefore would be unsuitable for mountain valleys or parts of eastern Washington. The greatest disadvantage to planting filberts in Washington is that eastern filbert blight has become established in this area. This fungus disease is slow to spread, but once established it infects and kills the fruiting branches. In advanced stages it is capable of eliminating whole trees. For this reason alone, planting filberts in Washington should be considered as extremely risky. Many years of work could be invested for very meager nut yields. There is no known control of eastern filbert blight.

For home gardeners who are willing to accept the risk, here are some tips on varieties and cultural practices used by successful filbert growers.

Varieties

Two trees of different varieties are required for pollination. Barcelona is the most widely planted variety because it yields well and has a round-shaped, free-husking nut of good quality. Daviana is the most effective pollinizer for Barcelona, but also the most susceptible to eastern filbert blight and particularly inviting to birds because of its thin shell. Duchilly, a variety producing elongated nuts, is an alternate pollinizer and preferred by some people for its sweet-flavored kernels. A major drawback, however, is the tight-clinging husk which must be forcibly removed at harvest time. Butler is a new variety used as a pollinizer.

Soil and Fertilizer

Filberts do best on deep, well-drained soils with high organic content. They also respond to annual applications of nitrogen fertilizer at rates of 1/4 to 1½ pounds active nitrogen per tree depending on age. This application is best made about mid-February by spreading the fertilizer over the entire area covered by branches. Lawn clippings, compost, or leaf mold may be used instead of chemical fertilizers. It is important to prevent weeds or grass from growing under the trees because of competition for moisture and the difficulty of harvesting from a weedy surface. Keep the ground clean by *shallow* cultivation or approved chemical herbicides.

Pruning and Training

Young trees are pruned and trained to develop a balanced framework of three to six scaffold branches. Prune mature filbert trees moderately each year to stimulate stem growth. The best nut production comes from shoots 6 to 9 inches long. It is characteristic for filberts to produce numerous suckers or shoots which come up around the base of the stump. Remove these by clipping, grubbing, or by

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chemical means to maintain a single-trunk tree. Basal sprouts should be controlled when less than 10 inches in height, so it may be necessary to repeat this treatment three or four times each growing season. Alternatively, filberts may be grown in bush form, with many trunks.

Insect Pests

Chief insect pests affecting filberts are worms inside the nuts and leaftiers or aphids on the foliage. The latter are not always serious enough to warrant treatment, but it is essential to protect the nuts on a routine basis.

Worm control measures come due in July with two applications of dust or spray recommended to catch both early- and late-emerging moths. Sevin is the insecticide most commonly used.

Spring or fall application of copper fungicides is advisable for bacterial blight control and to prevent accumulations of moss and lichens on the trunk or branches. The traditional "dormant" spray of lime-sulfur may only be applied to filberts after they have bloomed, but before they have leafed out. This is during a brief period usually occurring the last week of February and the first week of March.

Harvesting and Drying

The harvest of filberts is a simple process since the nuts are relatively nonperishable. The time of maturity varies considerably depending upon weather, but it generally occurs during October. Frost and dry winds will hasten nut drop, while prolonged rain will delay the process. It is customary to let filberts fall of their own accord, although shaking the trees may be helpful in some seasons.

A smooth, firmly packed soil surface prepared before the nuts start to fall makes it possible to sweep them into piles with a stiff lawn rake. This is more efficient than picking individual nuts out of grass and weeds.

Clean the nuts and spread out to dry within a week after gathering. Screen trays are recommended for this purpose to help air circulation. Portable heating units and fans also speed up the drying process, but be careful that the temperature never exceeds 105°F. A simple test for proper dryness is done by biting a cold kernel. At 10% moisture it will crack rather than mash under pressure and is then suitable for storage with less danger of molding.

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