

# Espaliered trees

**Q**uestion: I want to grow my own apples, but my yard is tiny. Any options?



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Master Gardener

**A**nswer: Small yard gardeners, don't despair! Standing in your garden on a late summer day and biting into a crisp, fresh-picked apple, sweet juice running down your chin, can absolutely be in your future.

Consider an espaliered fruit tree. They can be tucked into small spaces, even in larger yards.

In retirement, I had to downsize my gardening space from abundant acreage to the confines of an urban yard. Getting used to small space gardening has made for many adjustments, but it hasn't been as limiting as I initially feared.

I just have to be more deliberate about planning, a bit more judicious about which plants stay and go.

A small space gardener is rather like a reader with limited bookshelves. Something new in, something old shared. These days, I have to be a bit more open about traditional front and back yard plantings (most of my sun is in my front yard), and consider outside-the-box uses of space, particularly vertical and horizontal.

An espaliered tree is one that is trained to grow in a flat horizontal shape, making it easy to tuck along a fence or even to function both as food and an artful leafy screen. This takes little space and the flower bed in front can be companionably shared with other plants.

The first step is choosing the optimal space. An existing fence line may be the perfect place. Fruit trees need a minimum of eight hours of sun, and espaliered, at least eight feet of horizontal space.

In our garden, we have three against a fence, another creates a screen next to our patio, and we just planted two new ones in the front yard to double as a friendly boundary between our yard and our neighbor's parking area.

Trees are planted between two 8-10 foot posts, spaced eight or more feet apart, with 12 gauge (or heavier) galvanized wires stretched at 18

inches to 2 foot intervals to support the vertical growth.

Choose your tree(s) carefully. Not all fruit trees do well as espaliers. Apples and pears (and some others) generally thrive. Most varieties need a specific partner to pollinate: no pollinator, no fruit.

Dwarf stock is recommended. It is harder to encourage a tree to grow well outside its genetic destiny. Varieties that are known to be disease-resistant and proven to thrive in our climate ensure the best fruit for your labor.

And of course, whether you like tart or sweet, dream of a thick slice of apple pie or a crisp apple in your lunch box, will factor into your choice. Your extension agents or the OSU Extension website can be a great help.



COURTESY PHOTO

**A painting of an espaliered fruit tree by Master Gardener Julie Burchstead.**

Google searches often result in conflicting information or facts not true for our unique Umpqua Valley growing conditions.

The trickiest parts to growing an espaliered tree are patience and pruning. Pruning is critical and on-going. Without pruning, all fruit trees revert to their natural

habits, and this is particularly messy for an espalier.

Proper pruning can feel scary and overwhelming. But OSU has a wonderful publication (PNW 400) to guide you with a section specific to espalier.

Trees are also forgiving and resilient. I have made many mistakes along the way; few

ever end up being unsurmountable. For optimum results, home orchardists find timely feeding, watering and applications of dormant spray important.

Fall-February is a wonderful time for planting fruit trees. I picked up two apple trees from a local nursery in late October. My husband and I set the posts and wires for training, and tucked the young trees in for the winter.

It will likely take three to four years of love and tending to see our first fruit. That's where the patience comes in. But good things are worth waiting for. I look forward to that first sweet, juicy bite — one of the best treats of late summer.

*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*

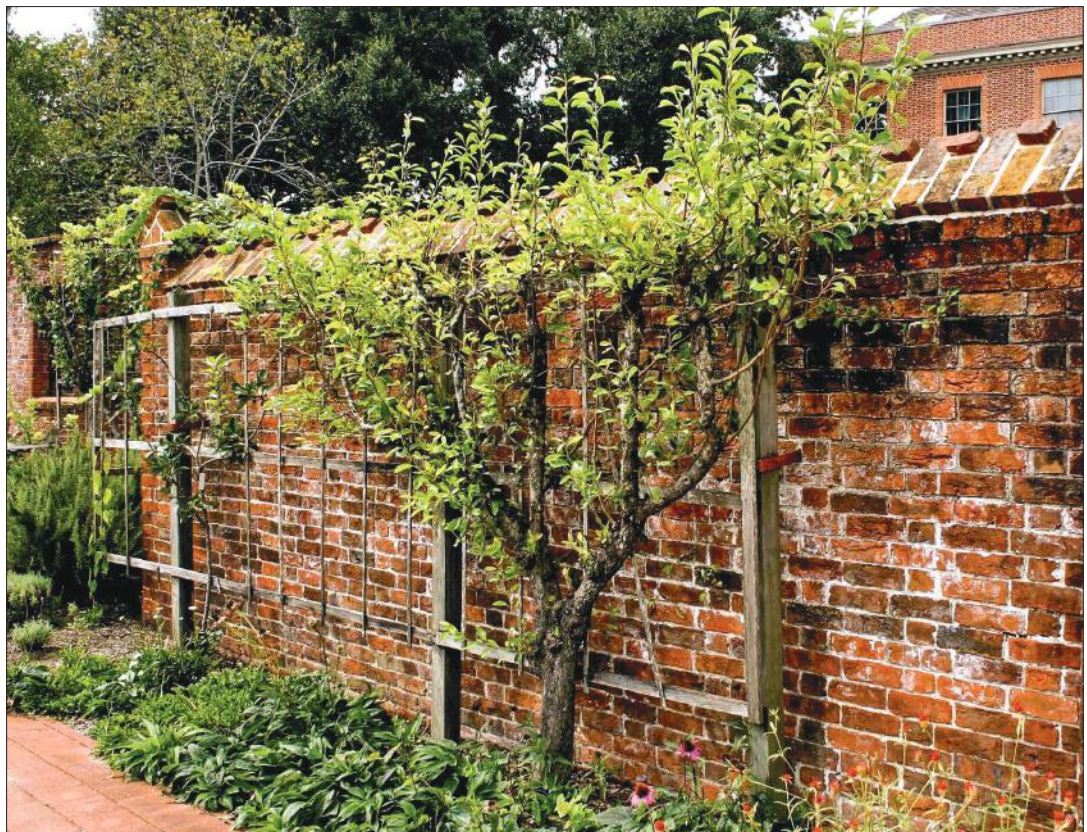


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**The horizontal shape of an espaliered tree makes it easy to tuck along a fence. Fruit trees need a minimum of eight hours of sun, and espaliered, at least eight feet of horizontal space.**