

FRUITY LOGIC

A reality check

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FRUIT GROWN IN CITIES ISN'T SAFE TO EAT.

Most research suggests otherwise. Key factoid: fruit does not absorb contaminants through the air or from soil. A decent scrub should wash away your concerns.

Tip: Avoid planting on a downslope to escape nasties from runoff.

SOIL IN THE CITY IS TOO CONTAMINATED TO SUCCESSFULLY GROW FRUIT TREES.

Harmful contaminants are no doubt present in our groundwater. The good news is that fruit and nut trees get most of their water and nutrients from roots well above where groundwater usually flows.

Tip: Get the soil tested.

ORCHARDS ATTRACT DISEASES AND PESTS THAT MAKE A MESS.

Overly dry or wet conditions breed bugs and disease. The trick: plant disease-resistant trees. Dwarf varieties are a good idea, too. They won't grow as large, making picking easier, and are harder for larger predators, like raccoons, to climb.

Tip: Accept the fact that squirrels and birds will get some fruit.

FRUIT TREES NEED TO BE SPRAYED WITH HARMFUL PESTICIDES.

Caring for fruit trees isn't always as easy as watering, fertilizing and adding mulch, but there are earth-friendly alternatives when fighting serious fruit tree diseases. Earthworks in Boston (earthworksboston.org) has published recipes for a number of concoctions using neem, seaweed extract and garlic, among other things.

Tip: A healthy plant is less likely to attract pests; a stressed tree releases chemicals that attract them.

ORCHARDS ARE NOT SAFE FOR CHILDREN

During the Ben Nobleman debate, city officials initially raised concerns about the orchard being an invitation for kids to climb the trees and possibly get injured. But in Boston, some of the city's most successful orchards are actually located on school property.

Tip: Think of the teaching opportunities.

