

Establishing tamarillos

There are a number of decisions to make when establishing tamarillos. You need to consider where to plant your crop, where to get plants from (from a nursery or grow your own from cuttings or seed), how to set out your crop and when to plant them. You also need to think about how you will train your crop and how you will maintain it once established.

Propagation

Tamarillos can be grown from seed or from cuttings. The method used will influence the characteristics of the mature plant, such as its height and shape.

A plant grown from seed will usually grow tall and have few low branches, but a plant grown from a cutting is shorter and more bushy (this depends on where on the plant the cutting is taken from).

Establishment

It is critical to ensure best growing conditions for any plants. Tamarillos must be carefully grown and maintained from day one if a healthy, high producing plant is to be developed. Care from the start will pay back many times over.

Site selection

Tamarillos are subtropical plants which grow best in a warm, moist environment. The chosen site needs to be frost-free, provide wind protection, have free draining soil and be able to supply water when needed.

They are very sensitive to frost, particularly when very young. Temperatures below freezing can damage growing shoots or cause premature fruit drop, and a severe frost can kill the whole plant. Although tamarillos will survive a slight frost it is best to choose a frost free site if possible.

Wind damage is a problem with tamarillos because they have quite brittle branches and large leaves. Protection from wind is necessary particularly when the branches are carrying fruit, so a sheltered site is needed. This may

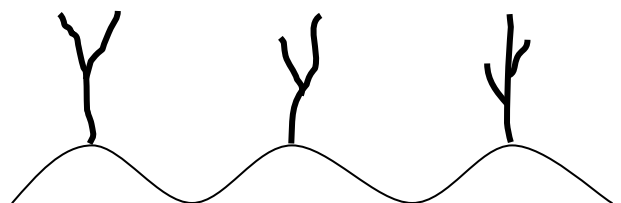


A plantation of young tamarillos, surrounded by a pine shelterbelt.

(<http://www.tamarillo.com/Tamarillo>)

mean a shelterbelt is necessary. There are a variety of plants which can be used for shelter - get advice about the best one for your situation.

Tamarillos are also damaged by waterlogged soil. They grow best in a light, deep, free draining soil as this provides good aeration and drainage. Soils with compacted layers should be avoided because they will trap water, or the layers should be broken up. An alternative to improve soil drainage and depth is to prepare the land in humps and hollows before planting, and plant onto the humps. This stops the young plants getting "wet feet".



Planting onto a series of humps and hollows can improve soil depth and drainage

Light, free draining soils sometimes have nutrient leaching problems which need to be monitored. Soil test before planting and add any lacking nutrients. Particularly important nutrients for tamarillos are nitrogen, potassium and magnesium.

Tamarillos need good drainage, but they are also sensitive to drought. Lack of water limits plant growth, fruit size and yields. It is likely that tamarillos will need irrigation during dry periods and peak growth times. The site you are considering needs to have access to water for irrigating.

Planting

If there is any danger of frost at your site it is best to plant in spring during October or November. This avoids any risk to the young growing shoots which are easily killed off by frosts.

However if planting in a frost-free area it may be practical to plant in April or May

Tamarillos are planted in rows with 1.0-1.5m between plants and 4.5-5.0m between rows. This distance avoids overcrowding and associated problems such as spread of disease, and makes pruning and spraying easier. It is close enough so that when the plants are fully grown they will interlace and support each other.

At a spacing of 1.5m between plants and 4.5 m between rows you would get about 1450 plants per hectare.

Tall plants grown from seed should be cut back at planting. Prune the main stem to about 0.5m to promote branching lower on the tree (they naturally branch at about 2m).

However, plants grown from cuttings are likely to grow with many low branches. These may need to be removed so the plant branches far enough above the ground.



A year-old tamarillo ready for its first prune

(<http://www.tamarillo.com/Tamarillo>)

Yield estimates

Tamarillos start producing fruit in their second year, with a small crop of about 4 tonnes/ha. In the third and fourth years yields of up to 16 tonnes/ha are possible, but production tends to drop off in subsequent years as some trees may be lost. The commercial life of a tamarillo is about 8 years.

'Te Pānui Tips' are simple fact sheets that cover topics designing organic crop production systems on the East Coast.

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