

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANTING A POMEGRANATE ORCHARD



If you wish to start a commercial pomegranate planting, please be aware that insufficient data and information are available to support **planting more than 1-2 acres** without **some risk** because of concerns remaining about what cultivars to plant and the ability to culture pomegranate and produce profitable crops of quality fruit.

When planting about 10 x 18 ft or 242 plants/acre, a trial planting of 1-2 acres would be an opportunity to test 4-8 cultivars with about 60 plants of each cultivar, or on one acre, a combination of a few cultivars accompanied by a small collection of cultivars for further evaluation could be planted.

Rules for Starting a Pomegranate Orchard in Florida

The following information is anecdotal and not research-based. It primarily comes from observations contributed by established and new growers as more and more pomegranate enthusiasts join in the experience and share their observations.

Rule #1: Avoid chronically wet sites. Pomegranates grow virtually anywhere in Florida. They tolerate heat, drought, cold, salinity, but do not tolerate wet roots. Considerable field evidence confirms that this rule applies to pomegranates.

Drainage is critical. If you attempt to grow poms in a chronically wet site, you might actually have temporary success. The plants will grow fine for a year or even longer as they become established. However, the plants will not reach full size especially if there is a shallow water table as occurs in many places throughout in Florida. When wet conditions occur and the water table rises into the root zone of the plant, too much water can lead to leaf drop. If the water drains away quickly enough, the plants will recover, but then the plant spends its life dealing with those site conditions rather than growing and fruiting.

Situations to avoid are low spots where water tends to accumulate; places with a shallow water table, especially one where the water table rises to the surface after light to medium rainfalls; and, heavy soils, i.e., those with high clay content that do not drain readily and, thus, tend to stay wet.

Raised beds: Chronically wet conditions are common in certain locations where citrus groves are planted. To overcome the drainage problems, the citrus trees are planted on beds. Pomegranates being grown in such sites are thriving, but are clearly not performing as are those being growing in better drained sites

Rule #2: Apply pre-plant compost. Pomegranates benefit from organic matter added to the planting site. When planting, excavate a 30-36 inch diameter hole deep enough to accommodate the plant. Mix the soil in a ratio of about 30-50% organic matter to 50-65% soil, respectively. Or, lay down a strip of organic material along the tree row and incorporate. A band about 4 ft. wide and 6 inches thick should be adequate.

A large range of organic materials is suitable, but it must be well composted. Examples include one site where composted water hyacinth was incorporated into a planting hole. At another location where poms were planted in typical citrus-like double rows beds, the site was covered initially with 20 tons/acre of composted material without incorporation. That site has subsequently been treated with two broadcast applications/year of 10 tons/acre each. If you are growing pomegranates organically, there are many approved materials.

Rule #3. Planting season is important to allow the maximum time in the first season for plant development and to help avoid winter cold damage. Pomegranates are at least as cold hardy as citrus, but experience has shown when planted in the Summer or early Fall, they are more likely to be cold damaged than those planted in early Spring. If possible, time your planting for late February to April for best growth. Large plants generally withstand cold better than smaller ones. **Winter planting:** Some growers have chosen to plant in the time period December-January with mixed results regarding plant survival.