

The Holistic Orchard: Tree Fuits and Berries the Biological Way

Michael Phillips

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Despite a wealth of information available about grafting, soil health, tree planting, and pruning, there's one major area of orchard management that's tough for any beginner to learn: confidence.

That's where Michael Phillips comes in. As a farmer in northern New Hampshire, and author of *The Apple Grower*, he provides gentle-but-sure advice on holistic orchards in a way that's encouraging and valuable.

"Gaining confidence to do this right is key," he writes. "You simply need to get over that proverbial hump that somehow you're going to screw this up and waste both time and money." Phillips wrote this guide, he adds, to give beginners the type of inspiration and knowledge they'll need to take a deep breath and get started.

Beginning with a fascinating explanation of forest-edge ecology—which defines where fruit trees thrive best—Phillips moves into topics like fungal dominance, haphazard mulching, pulsing agents, and more. He also tackles orchard design, horticulture, and orchard dynamics in tremendous detail, with abundant illustrations and photographs that give more clarity to his discussions.

For those moving to the next level of orchard management, Phillips delves into the specifics of three major categories of fruits: pome, which includes apples and pears; stone, which encompasses cherry, peach, plum, and apricot; and woody berries, including blackberry, currant, gooseberry, and raspberry. For each, he describes varieties worth considering, pest management, pollination issues, and harvest notes.

Throughout, Phillips adopts a genial tone that blends farmer-next-door friendliness with a more academic approach. The mix works, giving the scientific descriptions more weight while keeping the material accessible. His passion for sustainable agriculture is obvious as well, and drives the book nicely—rather than see fellow growers as competitors, for example, he's keen on expanding the community of growers and he's willing to share all his insights to achieve that mission.

In general, the sheer breadth of information presented can seem overwhelming, particularly for a beginner, but it's likely that those who are interested in getting started in holistic orchard practices will appreciate having such a thorough reference guide.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (December 27, 2011)

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