Choosing a fruit tree for your garden isn't like choosing a variety of vegetable for your plot. These are long term investments, which – if looked after properly – will provide a beautiful focal point and fruits for many years. Here's a guide to of some of the key considerations to bear in mind.

What Type Of Fruit Do You Like?
This is a good starting point. Do you crave soft juicy stone fruits like plums or apricots, or would you prefer something from the pome family such as an apple or pear tree? Stone fruits take this name because they develop around a hard pit, with the fruitlet establishing from the centre of the blossom. With pome types, on the other hand, the fruitlet develops above where the blossom was. Aside from taste and personal opinion, there isn't a great deal of difference between these two types and maintenance and pruning tasks are more or less the same whichever you choose. The best thing to do is think about which fruits you enjoy eating, look at what conditions the trees require and then assess whether your space can offer this.

Which Rootstocks Should You choose?
All fruit trees sold now are provided as grafted stock and include a scion (which relates to the variety of tree) and a rootstock. The rootstocks are the foundation of the tree and control the vigour of its growth and the ultimate height. The join between the two is identified by a bulge in the stem, which shows where the wood has knotted.
If left to their own devices, most fruit trees would grow considerably tall, but by using the rootstocks of a species that is fairly small or compact, growers can limit the overall height of the mature tree.

Rootstocks can be placed into five main categories: extreme dwarfing, dwarfing, semi dwarfing, semi vigorous and vigorous. These are distinguished by a combination of letters and numbers such as M26 or M9, and these differ between fruits. There is a size guide for all of our fruit trees on the left hand side of the product pages on our website.

Some key types to be aware of include:
For apples: Trees grown on M27 rootstocks will reach between 1.2 and 1.8m high, while trees with M26 rootstocks will grow to around 2.4 to 3m high.
For cherries: Trees grown on Gisella 5 rootstocks will grow to around 2.5-3m whereas those on Colt rootstocks will grow to approximately 4-5m high.
For pears: Trees grown on Quince A rootstocks will be around 3-4.5m high.
For peaches, plums, apricots and nectarines: Trees with St Julien rootstocks will grow to around 4.5m high while those on Montclare will grow to 3m high. Remember also that it is not just the rootstock that will affect the final height and spread of a tree. The conditions it is grown in – such as how fertile the ground is and whether it is in a container – will also have an impact, as will your pruning techniques. For example, some extreme dwarfing trees may only reach a height of 1m in a pot, but if grown in the ground they can become slightly larger.

What Shape Would You Like To Achieve?
Fruit trees can be trained into all sorts of shapes but certain types of fruit, varieties and rootstocks are more suited to some shapes than others, so it's worth researching this before buying. For example, bear in mind that while most trees that can be

trained into fan shapes, if you would like an espalier or cordon, it's best to choose an apple or pear tree.

The main shapes are as follows:

Bush: As the name suggests, this is more of a bush shape and features branches coming away from the trunk fairly close to the ground. A two year old tree that has been pruned back in the first winter to form a bush shape. Generally trees will be 140-160cm in height with multiple side branches. This height guide is an end of summer height.

Cordon: Growers in small spaces often train fruit trees into cordons. It involves the tree being grown at an angle and supported with a stake. Although these can be free standing trees that are grown upright.

Espalier: This is an option often utilised by gardeners who would like to grow their tree against a wall. Horizontal branches are trained in pairs, uniformly spaced on either side of the trunk.

Fan: This is another option for trees you wish to grow up a wall. The trunk is split into two branches, with side branches coming off here to create a fan shape.

Stepover: Stepover trees are often used to make a low edging to a path. They are created in a similar way to a cordon, but the process involves training them along a horizontal wire, 30cm from the ground.

What About Pollination?

Fruit trees need to be pollinated in order to create fruit, and while some varieties are self fertile (which means they will set a crop of fruit without any interaction with another tree), some aren't. These types will need exposure to pollen from a different variety of the same tree type. Sometimes a neighbour's tree can pollinate your own, but this is not always a failsafe method. Ideally, if you are looking at trees that require a pollination partner, you should buy two different varieties which flower at the same time of year. Some cultivars – which are known as 'triploids' – need a third pollinator nearby as they are poor pollinators. A pollination chart for Apple trees can be seen here - https://www.blackmoor.co.uk/guide/Care-Guide-17-Pollination-Made-Simple.pdf

Other Things To Consider

Taste: This is likely to have a huge influence on what variety and type of fruit you buy, and is a consideration that you shouldn't overlook. While tasting notes can be really useful it's also a good idea to actually try tasting different varieties before you commit to a type. Head to some local farmers' markets and apple days and see what you can pick up and sample.

Early and late varieties: With most fruit you'll find some varieties that proclaim to be early or late cropping. This means you can expect fruit either before the usual harvesting time, or after, and it's worth considering when you would like your fruit gluts. It's also worth bearing in mind that some types taste best eaten as soon as they are picked, whereas others can be stored for a considerable time.