

## An introduction to feijoas

The feijoa is a subtropical tree native to southern Brazil and Uruguay in South America. It is a more hardy plant than most subtropicals, flowering in late spring and producing ripe fruit over a two month period in April and May. It is fairly easy to maintain and is well suited to organic growing as it has few pests or diseases in New Zealand.

### Feijoas

Although they are subtropical, feijoas are fairly hardy plants. Due to their late flowering they are not affected by spring frosts although autumn frosts may damage fruit. They are quite frost tolerant but may be damaged by frosts below  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

Feijoas are reported to have some drought tolerance. However they need moisture during the fruiting season and hot dry summers may affect fruit set and yield. They will grow on most well drained soils, but are said to produce the best quality fruit in heavy soils. They have an optimum pH of 6-6.5. Feijoas are also somewhat tolerant of salt.

Sheltering the trees will help to prevent scarring on the fruit and damage from limb rub. It also protects the plant from branch breakage and reduced growth due to lower temperatures and increased water loss.

### How are feijoas grown?

Feijoas are planted in rows with 4-5m between each tree. At this spacing you get about 500 plants per hectare and the trees will meet in the rows after about 5 years (depending on pruning).

Fruit develops on new growth at the end of the last year's growth, so a bushier plant bears more fruit sooner. This needs to be balanced with keeping space in the trees for light and birds. Pruning to keep an open plant helps with pollination and preventing disease.

Most commercial varieties of feijoas are not self fertile (the exception is the cultivar "Unique"). To get best yields feijoas should be planted in blocks of more than one cultivar so that cross-pollination can occur. Feijoas are pollinated by birds - the most important in

New Zealand are the blackbird and the myna.



*Feijoa flowers - the plants are pollinated by birds*

### Managing feijoas

Feijoas need to be trained when young to build a strong framework for fruit to be carried on. It also encourages the plant to grow and fruit sooner. Once plants are established, removing some branches by pruning will help new growth and improve yields.

Key feijoa pests such as caterpillars and scale insects can be controlled with organic sprays. Nutrients probably need to be applied for optimum yields - what and how much depends on the soil nutrients available and the age of the trees.

Feijoas are harvested through April, May and June depending on the variety. They can be picked up off the ground or picked from the tree - when ripe they will detach easily. Ripeness on the tree can be difficult to tell, but the feijoas must be ripe enough that they will finish ripening once picked.

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

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