

Espaliers

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If you have an empty wall or fence, or if your gardening space is small, you may want to consider growing an "espalier" (pronounced "es-PAL-yer"). An espalier is any plant trained to grow in a flat plane against a wall, fence or trellis. The practice originally was used in the old world to conserve space in small orchards and gardens. The English use espalier for protective reasons. Espaliered fruit trees located against a wall with a southern exposure receive some protection from cold weather.

Although almost any plant can be espaliered, some plants have certain characteristics which make them better suited for this than others. Plants that produce many flexible lateral branches and have attractive flowers, fruit, foliage and/or bark are excellent choices. Here is a list of some of the plants which would do well as an espalier. (F= Formal, I= Informal) Citrus (Citrus spp. I), Sea grape (Coccoloba uvifera F,I), Loquat (Eriobotrya japonica F,I), Crape myrtle (Lagerstroemia indica I), Southern Magnolia (Magnolia grandiflora F,I), Podocarpus (Podocarpus spp. F,I), Poinsettia (Euphorbia pulcherrima I), Gardenia (Gardenia jasminoides I), Japanese privet (Ligustrum japonicum F,I), Plumbago (Plumbago auriculata I), Firethorn (Pyracantha coccinea F,I), Bougainvillea (Bougainvillea spp. I), Flame vine (Pyrostegia venusta I), Confederate jasmine (Trachelospermum jasminoides I), and Wisteria (Wisteria sinensis F,I).

Espaliers are not easy to train and require many hours of maintenance. The formal patterns are for those people who like to clip and tie. There are a number of formal patterns with varying degrees of complexity. Some of the patterns are called Cordon, U-shapes, Palmette, and Fence patterns. Others, who can not spend the time to develop and maintain a formal espalier should let the plant determine its own informal pattern. When it comes to developing an informal pattern there are no guidelines. A free-form design is limited only by your imagination and pruning skills.

Most informal and some formal espaliers are grown against a wall. When this is done it is best to keep the plant 6 to 8 inches from the wall. This will not only help make pruning and training easier, but it will also cut down on disease and insect problems. Eye bolts, TV-antenna guides or wooden blocks may be used to attach the plant to the wall. If a masonry wall is located behind the espalier, then masonry staples or concrete nails can be used. Lead expansion joints can be placed between concrete blocks or bricks and then eye screws can be inserted.

To maintain an espalier, prune all stray branches that grow outward at right angles to the flat surface. Also, prune branches that grow beyond the boundaries of the desired pattern. Pruning and the occasional tying of new shoots to the surface are the main maintenance requirements. Be careful to prune flowering shrubs and trees during the proper season.

If you are thinking about training an espalier for your landscape we have a bulletin that will give you basic information on how to begin. For those of you who have internet access simply go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/> and in the upper left hand search corner type in espalier and then click on “search edis”. Just click on the “pdf” form of the bulletin and then you can print it off. For anyone who wants a copy by mail, just give us a call at 633-1702 (Mon. – Fri between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.) and we will send you a copy.