

## Establishing feijoas

There are a number of decisions to make when establishing feijoas. You need to consider where to plant your crop, where to get plants from (from a nursery or grow your own), how to set out your crop and when to plant them. You also need to think about how you will train your crop and how you will maintain it once established.

### Propagation

Most feijoas are grown from cuttings or by grafting onto rootstocks. This is because plants grown from seed vary a lot in the timing, amount and size of fruit they produce and in other characteristics such as plant height - they may be quite different to the parent plant. By grafting or taking cuttings the plant which grows will have identical characteristics to the parent.

It is easiest to get plants from a nursery as they will have a number of varieties to choose from and will be able to suggest the best ones for your situation. Plants grown in a nursery will have also been trained to branch above 0.5m which makes harvesting easier.



*A young feijoa plant - this one hasn't been trained.*

<http://crash.ihug.co.nz/~treeman007/gaia/feijoa2.jpg>

### Site selection

Feijoas are fairly hardy plants and grow in a variety of conditions. Because they are subtropical they grow best in a moist and warm environment.

Feijoas will grow in most soils, but produce the best quality fruit in heavy soils. Ideally the soil should be well drained with a pH of 6-6.5 - they don't grow well in alkaline soil.

Feijoas grow even in places with relatively low nutrient levels, but for optimum yields you should have a soil test done and apply nutrients if levels are low.

Feijoas are relatively frost tolerant, although temperatures below  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$  will damage the plants, and autumn frosts may damage ripening fruit. They require between 100 and 200 hours of chilling to flower. Because feijoas flower late (November to December) spring frosts are not problem. Feijoas are also quite drought tolerant but hot and dry summers may affect fruit set and yield. Moisture is important during fruiting - in dry areas you may need to irrigate at this time.

A suitable site for growing feijoas needs to be sheltered. This prevents scarring and limb rub on the fruit and helps prevent branches from breaking off. Wind also affects growth by lowering temperature and increasing water loss, so sheltered plants will grow better.

## Planting

Before planting, soil nutrient problems should be dealt with and any weeds should be eliminated as they will compete with the young feijoas.

Planting is usually done in winter, between May and August. Adding a slow release organic fertiliser such as blood and bone to the soil when planting may be a good idea.

Feijoas are planted in rows about 4.5-5m apart. If planting as individual trees it is suggested to have about the same distance between plants in the same row. However if you are planting hedgerows a distance of 2-3m between plants is suitable.

Most feijoa varieties grow best if they can cross-pollinate. To allow this it is a good idea to plant at least a couple of different varieties, perhaps several rows of one and then several rows of another. Feijoas are pollinated by birds - the blackbird and the myna are the major pollinators in New Zealand.



*Feijoas are usually planted in rows*  
[www.sp.co.nz/rural\\_news/images/feijoa2.jpg](http://www.sp.co.nz/rural_news/images/feijoa2.jpg)

## Training

The aim of training is to encourage the plant to develop a strong framework of branches, and to minimise the amount of bare wood in the centre of the trees.

Removing the tips of the plant will encourage it

to produce more branches. It encourages new growth and causes the tree to produce fruit sooner.

Although you want to encourage branching it may also be necessary to thin some branches out. This is to allow light and birds to reach the centre of the tree, aiding pollination and helping to prevent disease.

## Yield estimates

Feijoas may produce a small crop of about 5 tonnes/ha in their third year, and more in subsequent years. They should be in full production by their seventh year, producing about 25 tonnes/ha.

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

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