

Part 1

PLANNING

The climate in the Top of the South area suits a great range of fruits, although there are some differences across the region that affect what you can grow.

Rainfall

The most obvious one is rainfall – the map shows a big difference from west to east, with moist conditions that suit subtropical plants in Golden Bay, through to the dry areas near Blenheim that are famous for olives and grapes.

Wind

There's also quite a difference in winds, especially in the east, which gets cold sou'-westers in winter, and hot nor'-westers in summer. If your property is exposed to strong winds, you'll need to create shelter.

Frost

If you're near the sea it will be less frosty, so you might be able to grow some subtropical plants in sheltered spots. If you're a long way from the sea, you'll have to consider whether the fruits you want to grow can handle frost, especially in spring when they're flowering.

Get to know your site

Most large fruiting plants need full sun. Smaller bushes and canes can handle some shade.

A typical town property will have several pockets (microclimates) that will suit particular plants. Walk around your place at different times of the day, and in different seasons, and take notes about:

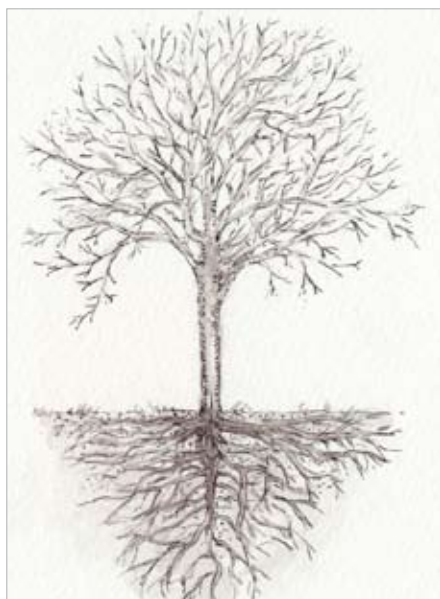
- the sunshine in various places – what time it arrives and leaves
- where North is (for maximum sunshine)
- places that get waterlogged (this can kill the plant)
- places that are sheltered from rain by a building e.g. under the house eaves
- where frost lies on winter mornings
- where the main winds come from in each season, and how strong they are
- any sheltered spots that could be used for tender plants
- how much space there is for plants to grow (width, height and root zone).

Think about other areas that you don't want to crowd or shade. Also think about whether your trees will create problems for your neighbours when they're fully grown (e.g. blocking the view, giving unwanted shade or annoying leaf litter).

It's important to know where underground pipes are (e.g. water, stormwater or sewage), as tree roots can cause expensive problems later on.

It can be hard to picture the full-grown size of the baby tree that you plant – it helps to put sticks in the ground to mark out its future spread. Remember that the root zone will spread about as wide as the branches (see the diagram).

It's worth taking the time to draw a plan of your property – it means you'll fill every suitable space as time and money allow.



Leaf zone and root zone

Note the drip line from the ends of the branches – this shows you how wide to spread fertiliser and mulch.

Judith Cowley