



FL PANHANDLE EDIBLES

GROWING GOOD

FREE STARTER GUIDE

Zone 9B Food Forest Starter Plant List

28 hand-selected edible plants proven to thrive in the Florida Panhandle —
organized by layer, yield, and time to harvest.

YOUR COMPLETE PLANTING BLUEPRINT

28

PLANTS PROFILED

7

FOREST LAYERS

300+

DAY GROWING SEASON

9B

HARDINESS ZONE

YOUR ZONE 9B BLUEPRINT

How to Use This Guide

Zone 9B at a Glance

Zone 9B Florida sits where subtropical and temperate climates meet. Winter lows of 25–30°F are offset by a 300–350 day growing season and year-round production that colder climates can't match.

Key challenge: sandy "sugar sand" with only 1–2% organic matter. The fix is to build soil on top rather than amend the sand below.

How to Read Each Plant Entry

Every plant in this guide includes:

1. **Layer** — which of the 7 food forest layers it occupies
2. **Tags** — cold-hardiness, harvest season and more
3. **Yield estimate** — realistic production per plant/year
4. **Key notes** — Zone 9B tips from our nursery

PRIORITY plants are our top recommendations for beginners.

STACKING FUNCTIONS FOR MAXIMUM ABUNDANCE

The 7-Layer Food Forest Structure



The 7 layers of a Zone 9B food forest — from roots underground to the canopy. Each layer catches sunlight at a different height, so more food grows in the same space.

Canopy (20–40+ ft)

Wind protection, microclimate and long-term fruit. Key plants: Avocado, Persimmon

Understory (10–20 ft)

The production powerhouse for most of your fruit. Key plants: Papaya, Banana, Fig, Loquat, Mulberry, Moringa

Shrub (3–8 ft)

High-value fruit and perennial vegetables. Key plants: Chaya, Surinam Cherry, Cherry of the Rio Grande, Katuk, Pigeon Pea

Herbaceous (1–3 ft)

Greatest diversity: perennial vegetables, herbs and dynamic accumulators. Key plants: Ginger, Turmeric, Okinawa Spinach, Cassava

Ground Cover (0–12 in)

Living mulch that suppresses weeds, holds moisture and fixes nitrogen. Key plants: Perennial Peanut, Sweet Potato, Strawberry

Vine (vertical)

Uses fences, trellises and trunks. Key plants: Passion Fruit, Chayote, Muscadine, Malabar Spinach

PLAN YOUR SUCCESSION FOR YEAR-ROUND ABUNDANCE

Timeline to First Harvest

PLANT	TIME TO HARVEST	LAYER	NOTES
Malabar Spinach	6 weeks	VINE	Edible leaves in 6 weeks; heat-loving
Chaya PRIORITY	4 months	SHRUB	Year-round once established
Sweet Potato	4 months	ROOT	Leaves edible while waiting
Moringa	6 months	UNDERSTORY	Cut back hard; regrows in 8–10 weeks
Pigeon Pea	6 months	SHRUB	Also fixes nitrogen
Papaya PRIORITY	8 months	UNDERSTORY	50–150 lbs/year per tree
Banana PRIORITY	12 months	UNDERSTORY	Pups keep the clump producing
Passion Fruit	18 months	VINE	50–100 fruits/vine/year
Surinam Cherry	18 months	SHRUB	2 crops/year
Cherry of the Rio Grande	24 months	SHRUB	Sweet, cherry-like fruit; cold-hardy
Fig	24 months	UNDERSTORY	20–40 lbs/year
Mulberry	30 months	UNDERSTORY	20–40 lbs/year
Loquat PRIORITY	36 months	UNDERSTORY	Fruits Nov–March (off-season!)
Avocado PRIORITY	2–3 years*	CANOPY	*Grafted trees; seedlings take 7–9 years
Persimmon	3 years*	CANOPY	*Grafted trees; very cold-hardy

The Grafted Tree Advantage

Seedling avocado trees can take 7–9 years to produce fruit. Our grafted Fantastic, Winter Mexican and Mexicola Grande avocado trees fruit in 2–3 years — the same plant, a fraction of the wait. This is the single most important purchasing decision you will make for your food forest.

20–40+ FEET • THE STRUCTURAL BACKBONE

Canopy Layer

Avocado PRIORITY

Persea americana — Fantastic / Winter Mexican / Mexicola Grande

BUY GRAFTED COLD-HARDY

Fantastic, Winter Mexican and Mexicola Grande are the avocados we grow and sell for Zone 9B cold tolerance. Grafted trees from our nursery fruit in 2–3 years vs. 7+ for seedlings. Plant on the south side of your property for frost protection.

→ Yield: 50–200 lbs/year (grafted)

Persimmon

Diospyros virginiana / *D. kaki* — Fuyu / Hachiya

NATIVE COLD-HARDY

American Persimmon (*D. virginiana*) is native to the Southeast and cold-hardy to -20°F. Asian varieties (Fuyu, Hachiya) produce large, sweet fruits. Both thrive in Zone 9B with minimal inputs and no pest pressure.

→ Yield: 25–100 lbs/year at maturity

10–20 FEET • THE PRODUCTION POWERHOUSE

Understory Layer

Papaya PRIORITY*Carica papaya*

YEAR-ROUND

The fastest-producing tree in your food forest. Fruits in 8–10 months and produces continuously. Cold-sensitive below 32°F — plant in a protected microclimate or near a south-facing wall.

→ Yield: 50–150 lbs/year per tree

Loquat PRIORITY*Eriobotrya japonica*

COLD-HARDY

WINTER HARVEST

One of the most underrated trees for Zone 9B. Fruits November–March when almost nothing else is producing — your off-season abundance machine. Cold-hardy to 12°F.

→ Yield: 50–100 lbs/year

Fig*Ficus carica* — Brown Turkey / Celeste

COLD-HARDY

Brown Turkey and Celeste are the best varieties for Zone 9B. Produces two crops per year (June and August–October). Extremely low maintenance and drought-tolerant.

→ Yield: 20–40 lbs/year

Moringa*Moringa oleifera*

CHOP & DROP

FAST-GROWING

An understory tree that reaches 25–30 ft if left alone. Keep it at 8–10 ft with active pruning — cut it back hard and it regrows in 8–10 weeks, giving you edible leaves and plenty of chop-and-drop mulch. Leaves are 25–30% protein dry weight.

→ Yield: 30–50 lbs biomass/cutting

Banana PRIORITY*Musa spp.* — Dwarf Orinoco / Dwarf Cavendish / Red Cuban

FRUITING VARIETIES

Dwarf Orinoco, Dwarf Cavendish and Red Cuban are the bananas that fruit here. Plant in clusters of 3–5 for wind protection; pups replace each mother plant after it fruits, so the clump keeps producing. Blue Java (Ice Cream) grows well but won't fruit here — grow it as an ornamental and for chop-and-drop mulch.

→ Yield: 30–100 lbs/cluster/year

Mulberry*Morus rubra* / *Morus alba* — Everbearing

NATIVE

Everbearing mulberry produces for 9+ months in Zone 9B. Fast-growing and excellent for establishing canopy quickly while long-term trees mature.

→ Yield: 20–40 lbs/year

Jaboticaba*Plinia cauliflora*

HIGH VALUE

Produces grape-like fruits directly on the trunk and branches. Highly ornamental and commands premium prices at farmers markets. Slow-growing but extremely long-lived and productive.

→ Yield: 20–50 lbs/year at maturity

3-8 FEET • INTENSIVE PRODUCTION ZONE

Shrub Layer

Chaya (Tree Spinach) **PRIORITY***Cnidoscolus aconitifolius***YEAR-ROUND**

Perhaps the most productive perennial vegetable for Zone 9B. Produces 50–100 lbs of edible leaves annually. Must be cooked to neutralize mild toxins. Thrives in heat and recovers rapidly from frost.

→ Yield: 50–100 lbs leaves/year

Katuk

*Sauropus androgynus***SHADE-TOLERANT**

Produces tender, protein-rich leaves (6–8% protein fresh weight) with a pea-like flavor. Grows 5–8 ft as a shade-tolerant shrub — perfect for planting beneath understory trees.

→ Yield: Continuous leaf harvest

Cherry of the Rio Grande

*Eugenia aggregata***COLD-HARDY****HIGH VALUE**

Produces sweet, dark-red cherries with a rich, complex flavor. One of the most underutilized high-value shrubs for Zone 9B. Cold-hardy to 22°F, drought-tolerant once established, and commands premium prices at farmers markets.

→ Yield: 10–20 lbs/year

Surinam Cherry

*Eugenia uniflora***YEAR-ROUND****HIGH VALUE**

One of the most productive fruit shrubs for Zone 9B. Produces two crops per year with 30–50 lbs of tart, vitamin-rich cherries. Excellent for fresh eating, jams, and juices. Cold-hardy to 24°F and extremely heat-tolerant.

→ Yield: 30–50 lbs/year

Pigeon Pea

*Cajanus cajan***N-FIXER**

A fast-growing nitrogen-fixing shrub that produces edible peas while building soil fertility. Chop-and-drop the branches as high-nitrogen mulch. Regrows vigorously after cutting.

→ Yield: 5–10 lbs peas + biomass/year

Lemongrass

*Cymbopogon citratus***YEAR-ROUND**

Compact culinary lemongrass clumps serve triple duty: aromatic border plant, pest-deterrent mulch when cut, and a high-demand culinary herb at farmers markets. Harvest stalks continuously year-round in Zone 9B.

→ Yield: Year-round continuous harvest

0-3 FEET • THE DIVERSITY ENGINE

Herbaceous Layer

Ginger & Turmeric

Zingiber officinale / *Curcuma longa***SHADE-TOLERANT****HIGH VALUE**

Thrive in partial shade beneath larger trees. Plant in late winter/early spring, harvest after 8–10 months. Produce 2–5 lbs of rhizomes per plant.

→ Yield: 2–5 lbs rhizomes/plant

Okinawa Spinach

*Gynura crepioides***YEAR-ROUND**

Exceptional performance in Florida's heat and humidity. Produces succulent, nutty, mineral-rich leaves year-round. Tolerates both full sun and partial shade.

→ Yield: Year-round continuous harvest

0-3 FEET • THE DIVERSITY ENGINE

Herbaceous Layer (continued)

Longevity Spinach

Gynura procumbens

MEDICINAL

Long used as a traditional medicinal green. Grows as a 1-2 ft groundcover with mild, edible leaves. Extremely low maintenance once established.

→ Yield: Continuous leaf harvest

Cassava

Manihot esculenta

HEAT-LOVING

DUAL PURPOSE

A tough root crop that shrugs off sandy soil, summer heat and dry spells. Frost knocks back the tops, but roots are ready 8-12 months after planting. Always peel and cook before eating — raw cassava is toxic.

→ Yield: 5-10 lbs roots/plant

Society Garlic

Tulbaghia spp.

YEAR-ROUND

Provides year-round onion-flavored greens as an evergreen perennial. Exceptional pest resistance and drought tolerance.

→ Yield: Year-round harvest

0-12 INCHES • THE LIVING MULCH

Ground Cover Layer

Perennial Peanut

Arachis glabrata

N-FIXER

The gold standard nitrogen-fixing groundcover for subtropical food forests. Forms dense 6-12 inch mats that fix 40-60 kg of nitrogen per hectare annually.

→ Yield: 40-60 kg N/hectare/year

Sweet Potato

Ipomoea batatas

DUAL PURPOSE

Functions as both groundcover and root crop. Vining foliage spreads 10-20 feet while producing 5-15 lbs of tubers per plant after 4-5 months. Leaves are edible too.

→ Yield: 5-15 lbs tubers/plant

Strawberry

Fragaria × ananassa — Seascape

SPRING + FALL HARVEST

Seascape is our pick for Zone 9B. The main harvest comes in early spring — weeks ahead of growers up north — with a second, smaller crop in fall once temperatures cool.

→ Yield: 0.5-2 lbs/plant (spring + fall)

VERTICAL • MAXIMUM 3D SPACE USE

Vine Layer

Passion Fruit

Passiflora edulis / *P. incarnata*

FL NATIVE

P. edulis (tropical) produces 50–100 fruits/vine/year. *P. incarnata* (native Maypop) is cold-hardy to 0°F. Both grow vigorously 20–40 ft annually.

→ Yield: 50–100 fruits/vine/year

Chayote Squash

Sechium edule

YEAR-ROUND

Among the most productive vegetables possible in Zone 9B. Single vines produce 50–200+ fruits annually once established.

→ Yield: 50–200+ fruits/vine/year

Muscadine Grape

Vitis rotundifolia — *Carlos* / *Scuppernong*

FL NATIVE

The grape that truly thrives in Florida's humidity. The native species evolved to tolerate the fungal diseases that devastate European grapes.

→ Yield: 20–40 lbs/vine/year

Malabar Spinach

Basella alba / *B. rubra*

HEAT-LOVING

A vigorous climbing vine that thrives in Zone 9B's heat and humidity where regular spinach bolts immediately. Glossy, succulent leaves with a mild flavor. Harvest continuously from spring through fall — edible in 6 weeks from planting.

→ Yield: Continuous leaf harvest

THE PLANTS THAT DO THE WORK BEHIND THE SCENES

Service Plants: The Functional Framework

Nitrogen-Fixers

Feed the soil with nitrogen and cut fertilizer needs.

- Pigeon Pea (*Cajanus cajan*)
- Perennial Peanut (*Arachis glabrata*)
- Ice Cream Bean (*Inga edulis*)
- Desmodium, Clover, Cowpeas

Dynamic Accumulators

Pull minerals up from the subsoil into leaves you chop and drop.

- Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*)
- Mexican Sunflower (*Tithonia*)
- Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)
- Lambsquarters (*Chenopodium*)
- Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*)
- Amaranth (*Amaranthus* spp.)

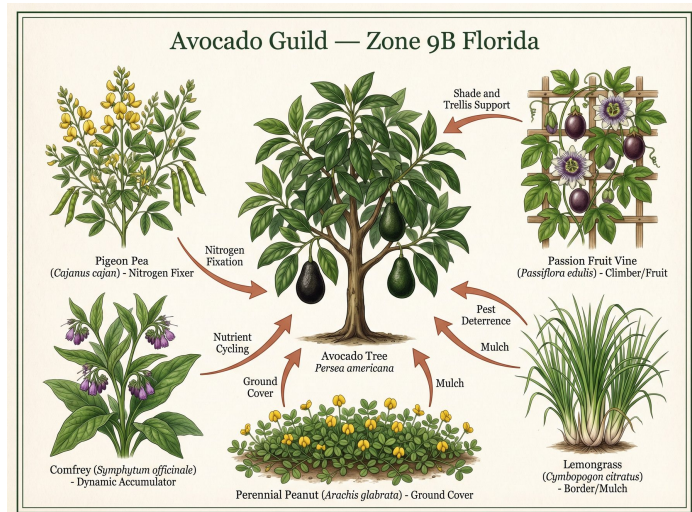
Pollinator Plants

Help fruit set and bring in beneficial insects that eat pests.

- Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*)
- Coreopsis (native Florida)
- Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias*)
- Goldenrod (*Solidago*)
- Scarlet Sage (*Salvia coccinea*)
- Pentas, Firebush

A COMPLETE PLANTING DESIGN FOR ZONE 9B

The Avocado Guild: Your First Plant Community



What Is a Plant Guild?

A guild is a community of plants that work together to support a central species — here, your Avocado tree. Each plant has a job: feeding the soil, attracting pollinators, suppressing weeds, or producing a second harvest.

The Avocado Guild Plant List

1. Avocado Tree (center) — the guild anchor
2. Pigeon Pea — nitrogen fixer, chop-and-drop mulch
3. Comfrey — dynamic accumulator, mineral cycling
4. Perennial Peanut — ground cover, N-fixer
5. Lemongrass — border/mulch, pest deterrent
6. Passion Fruit — vertical layer, more fruit

See our free **Avocado Guild** guide for the full planting plan.

Soil Prep: The Non-Negotiable First Step

Build your soil on top of the sand before planting:

1. Lay cardboard directly on the sand (weed barrier)
2. Add 3–4 inches of well-aged compost
3. Add 3–4 inches of composted manure
4. Top with 8–12 inches of wood chips
5. Install irrigation before planting

Ready to Start Your Zone 9B Food Forest?

Visit FL Panhandle Edibles for the plants in this guide — including our grafted Fantastic, Winter Mexican and Mexicola Grande avocados, Persimmon, and rare tropical varieties. We can help you pick the right plants for your space, soil and goals.

VISIT OUR NURSERY OR SHOP ONLINE

5198 County Road 30A, Port St. Joe, FL 32456 • Open Saturday 9–5; Wednesday–Friday by appointment

Pickup at the nursery or local delivery in ZIP 32456 (\$50). We don't ship plants.

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