

# Fruit trees in home landscapes yield tasty rewards

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson



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I'm about to describe a true story that occurred last week. During my last visit to my barber, a gentleman came in and sat near me. When he glanced over at me, he promptly said, "I know you ... I read your garden column every week."

His face lit up as he described his satisfaction (and success) in growing a wide variety of citrus. He noted that as the harvest from the two grapefruit trees in his front yard was nearing the picking stage, motorists driving along his street would slow down to view his fruit trees. Several residents in his neighborhood come over to ask permission to take photos of his trees. He reported his harvest of grape-

fruits was so large that he shared a sizable portion with friends, neighbors and curious visitors and still had ample amounts for fresh consumption by his family.

He was ready to expand his "mini fruit orchard" to include peach trees and asked for my recommendations on growing peaches.

First, he asked if he needed to plant more than one peach variety in the backyard to ensure fruit set? Fortunately, all peach varieties grown in this area are self-fruitful, which means a gardener can plant a single peach tree in their landscape and produce a good harvest of fresh and delicious peaches.

His next question was what peach varieties do I recommend. I admitted to him upfront to having a pronounced bias when it comes to peach varieties. My standard answer to this question is Tropic Snow, Tropic Snow and Tropic Snow. But in my defense, I also admit to having a single peach tree in my landscape and it's a Tropic Snow. Tropic Snow is a white flesh, semi-freestone peach with an extremely sweet flavor.

We grow five peach varieties in the Master Gardeners' demonstration orchard in Carbine Park, and I can report all five varieties under evaluation (FlordaKing, MayPride, TexKing, Tropic Beauty and Tropic Snow) produce very

Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

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well, and each variety has its own distinctive flavor. However, gardeners can count on any homegrown peach tasting far better than any peach brought from the produce section of the grocery or opened from a can.

If deciding on a peach variety is too difficult, then consider one of the cocktail varieties of peach trees. These fruit trees have several varieties of peaches grafted onto the same tree. They are ideal for small space gardening and for those who want to sample many flavors. They also provide the advantage of a prolonged harvesting season.

If you have been contemplating growing and harvesting fresh peaches or other fruits grown in your home landscape, now is the time to make plans for such mouthwatering harvests. That's right — if you want fresh fruit right off the tree, you can do it.

Galveston County is blessed with a growing climate is favorable for many different kinds of fruit trees. If you plan your selections well, you can even have something wonderful, fresh and packed full of flavor in that fruit bowl on your table throughout most of the year.

Fruit trees — perfectly adapted for our climate — will be available at the annual Master Gardener Fruit Tree Seminar and Sale on Feb. 5 at the Wayne Johnson Community Center located in Carbide Park, 4102 FM 519, in La Marque. (A printable map and program schedule are available on the website listed at the end of this column.)

Heidi Sheesley, of TreeSearch Farms, will provide a seminar on Fruit and Citrus Varieties for the Gulf Coast from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m., highlighting the star varieties. The plant sale will be from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The fruit trees at the sale can provide an ongoing banquet of gorgeous, luscious fruit through the four seasons. Both bare-root and container-grown trees will be available. There will be the standards, including apples, blackberries, pears, plums, a wide selection of citrus as well as peaches (including multiple varieties grafted onto a single tree). There also will be some hard-to-find and exotic fruit trees that grow well in our area.

#### Seminar On Blueberries Set For Saturday

We have been asked many times how one can grow his or her own blueberries in the garden to enjoy this sweet treat during the summer months. And, it has not gone unnoticed by most people asking about growing blueberries that one does not see them commonly grown in local gardens.

Yes, blueberries can be successfully grown in our area but variety selections and soil preparation are critical factors to consider. Blueberries bring a unique combination of delicious fruit and striking ornamental beauty to the garden and landscape.

If you have an interest in growing blueberries, be sure to attend our "Fresh Blueberries from your Home Garden" seminar from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. It will be held at the Galveston County Extension Office, 5115 state Highway 3, in Dickinson. This program is free, but preregistration is required. Call 281-534-3413, Ext. 1, 2 or e-mail galv3(at)wt.net.

