



PHOTO BY **Helle Brown**

**Master Gardener Penny Bessire (pictured above) inspecting citrus trees offered at the fruit and citrus tree sale held last Saturday. Master Gardeners will offer a second opportunity to purchase fruit and citrus trees at the Horticulture Demonstration Garden in Carbide Park from 9:00 - 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, Feb. 12.**

The Master Gardener volunteers sponsored a fruit tree seminar and sale last Saturday. The weather was ideal and hundreds of gardeners showed up. Many, many folks commented on the quality of the fruit trees on hand as well as the quantity. If you were not able to attend this year's plant sale, you will be afforded a second opportunity to

purchase fruit and citrus trees at the Horticulture Demonstration Garden in Carbide Park from 9:00 - 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, Feb. 12. Visit the Master Gardeners' website (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html>) for additional details or contact the County Extension Office (281-534-3413, ext. 12 or [GAL-](mailto:GAL-V3@wt.net)

[V3@wt.net](mailto:V3@wt.net)).

Individuals attending the event had a variety of questions on growing fruit trees as well as a variety of non-fruit tree related questions. The following is a sampling of the questions asked.

**Question: What kind of planting hole do I need to prepare to plant my peach tree?**

**Answer:** I thought about



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Mrs. White, my high school English teacher, as I responded to the gentleman's question by asking, "How much did you pay for that peach tree?" (Mrs. White thought it to be rather rude for anyone to answer a question with a question even if it is an indication that one is listening and paying attention.)

I explained to the buyer that he should put a twenty-dollar tree into a twenty-dollar planting hole. A twenty-dollar planting hole is not a time-consuming activity. The planting hole should be no deeper than the root system but at least twice as wide as the diameter of the root ball.

Save the removed soil because it needs to be placed back into the planting hole. Do not try to improve the soil with amendments such as a commercial garden soil mix or even compost. Roots have a tendency to not "venture out" from the fluffy amended soil and the tree can become root-bound.

This is particularly true for gumbo clay soil. Water tends to pool in a planting hole amended with a garden soil mix or compost. If its root system becomes waterlogged, the fruit tree will die.

As soil is moved back to fill the planting hole, be sure to lightly tamp it to settle and firm the soil as well as avoid large air spaces occurring in the backfill. Don't use your foot as doing so will likely result in excessive soil

compaction around the roots.

**Question: Will citrus trees do well if grown in containers?**

Answer: Yes, many types of citrus trees will do well in containers if adequate care is provided and if you have a large enough pot. However, do not expect as big a tree as one grown in the ground. Also, it is very important to purchase citrus trees grafted onto Flying Dragon rootstock. This type of rootstock dwarfs the tree (still giving you full size fruit). Citrus grafted onto Flying Dragon rootstock have a few extra degrees of cold hardiness. It is important that a large enough container is used—at least a 15-gallon size container should be used for most dwarf-type trees while up to 30-gallon containers should be used for larger size trees. Many gardeners use half whiskey barrel planters (available many gardening outlets) to grow citrus plants.

Be aware that fruit and citrus trees grown in containers must be watered often and throughout the year including the winter season.

**Question: What is the difference between "clingstone" and "freestone" peaches?**

Answer: In a clingstone peach, the flesh clings to the stone and will not separate easily from the stone. A freestone peach will separate very easily from the stone when the peach is cut in half and twisted. One note of

importance - a clingstone peach contains more pectin in the fruit than a freestone peach; therefore, clingstone peaches are the best type to use when making jelly.

**Question: What does the term "chill hour requirement" mean?**

Answer: In order to set fruit, most trees require exposure to a minimum number of hours of temperatures within the range of 32 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit. This temperature range is called "chill hour requirement" and the amount can vary widely for varieties within a given fruit class. The local growing area has a range of 500 chill hours to less than 200 chill hours over a winter season.

If an advertisement claims a fruit tree is hardy to zero for a zillion hours, then don't expect a lot of fruit if you grow it locally! Look for a variety that says it needs "low chill hours" or 400 chill hours or less.

**Question: Will you sell this wagon?**

The pros and cons of American capitalism have been debated time and time again. Two buyers were ready and very willing to pay a very un-fair price based on market demand for wagons after the sale yard was opened but I respectfully declined the offers as wagons were already in short supply.