



PHOTOS BY **William M. Johnson**



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Master Gardener Barbara Lyons (pictured above) tagging in citrus trees during setup day prior to the 2016 Master Gardener Spring Plant Sale held last Saturday at the County Fairgrounds. Master Gardeners will offer a second opportunity for the public to purchase fruit and citrus trees as well as tomato and pepper transplants at the Horticulture Demonstration Garden in Carbide Park from 9:00 - 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, Feb. 25.

The Master Gardener volunteers sponsored a spring plant seminar and sale last Saturday at the Rodeo Area at the County Fairgrounds. The weather was ideal (our bar for ideal weather for a plant sale is quite low: no freezing temperatures, no rain, no fog) and hundreds of gardeners showed up. Many, many folks commented on the quality of the fruit trees on hand as well as the quantity. Home

tomato growers were able to select from a wide array of tomato varieties as well as different types of tomatoes (such as heirlooms, hybrids, determinate, indeterminate and bush types).

If you were not able to attend this year's spring plant sale, you will be afforded a second opportunity to purchase citrus and fruit trees as well as spring vegetables at the

Horticulture Demonstration Garden in Carbide Park from 9:00 - 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, Feb. 25. Visit the Master Gardeners' website (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html>) for additional details or contact the County Extension Office by e-mail (GALV3@wt.net) or by phone (281-309-5065) Individuals attending the

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event had a variety of questions on growing vegetables and citrus/fruit trees as well as a variety of non-fruit tree related questions. The following is a sampling of the questions asked.

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

Answer: I thought about 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 the creation of large air spaces in the backfill. Don't use your foot as doing so will likely result in excessive soil compaction around the roots.

Q: Will citrus trees do well if grown in containers?

A: That would be a definite 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 also 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 at 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.

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

A: Almost all fresh peaches sold in grocery stores and roadside fruit markets are freestone. They are generally softer and juicier, and

because the pits pull away from the flesh so easily, they can be cut nicely into uniform pieces for tarts or pies. Clingstone peaches are used mostly for canned fruit and work best in recipes calling for diced or pureed peaches.

One note of importance - a clingstone peach contains more pectin in the fruit than a freestone; therefore, clingstone peaches are the best type to use when making jelly. I find both types of peaches to be flavorful when left to mature on a tree and picked fresh.

Q: Will you sell this wagon?

A: The pros and cons of American capitalism have been debated time and time again. Four customers were ready and very willing to pay a very unfair, cash-on-spot 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.

Q: Does the cost of a fruit tree include planting it in my landscape?

Several such questions, and variations of this question, were asked. Two customers were aware that I consider chocolate to be one of the major food groups and said that ample chocolate could be provided to seal the bargain. Donald Trump would consider them to be savvy deal makers. The answer was still "no."

I along with the Master Gardener volunteers did enjoy meeting and interacting with the customers at the sale.