

Gardeners ask a variety of questions

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



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PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson



The Master Gardener volunteers sponsored a fruit tree seminar and sale last week-end. Individuals attending the event had a variety of questions on growing fruit trees as well as other food plants. The rapid drop in temperature after the arrival of a cool front during mid-morning prompted bidding for jackets to a high level.

Following is a sampling of the questions asked.

Q: All of my broccoli plants have produced beautiful masses of yellow flowers. Is my broccoli season over or can I get more heads from it?

A: The center head produced by broccoli always is the largest and is what most folks think of when talking about

broccoli. The broccoli we prepare for the table is simple a compact cluster of unopened flower buds.

Home gardeners who grow this cool-season crop soon learn the secondary or side sprouts along the main stem also will produce edible heads of broccoli. Although these heads are smaller in size, they are produced in large numbers and provide an extended harvest season. I find these heads to be more tasty and tender than the main head.

Yes, broccoli, as most people probably know it, is the flower buds that produces the maze of creamy yellow flowers. Unharvested broccoli will bolt fairly quickly when temperatures start to warm.

After broccoli plants start blooming, they will set seed. If you have space in your garden, I recommend leaving until their flowers fade as butterflies and honeybees will utilize the flowers as a source of nectar. Your broccoli harvest is over, but the flowers are edible and can be used in salads.

Turnips, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, mustard greens, radishes and broccoli are known as cole crops and are related. All will produce a similar maze of yellow flowers during this time of year if not harvested or incompletely harvested.

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

A: Yes, many types of fruit

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and citrus trees will do well in containers if adequate care is provided. It is important that a large enough container be 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.

Be aware that fruit and citrus trees grown in containers must be watered often and throughout the year, including the winter season. A slow release fertilizer should be applied in the spring and a liquid fertilizer containing minor elements should be applied every two to four weeks during the active growing season. Another benefit of growing in containers is that plants can be brought inside a garage in the event of cold weather in early spring.

Q: I purchased several bare root fruit trees at your plant sale. You placed their roots in a plastic bag with moist hay. How long can I keep them in the plastic bags before having to plant them in the ground?

A: It would be best if you could plant your tree as immediately as possible after getting home. However, you can store your bare root peach trees in plastic bags with moist hay for at least one week if you provide proper care. Bare root trees with the roots enclosed in plastic bags must be kept out of the sun at all times to avoid warming up the roots inside to potentially harmful temperatures.

Check every two days or so to be sure the hay is adequately moist. Root drying is a major cause of plant failure, and lethal drying can take place very quickly if the hay is not kept moist.

Remember to keep the hay moist, but not overly wet, to avoid development of moldy growth and to store the tree or trees in a cool place.

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

A: In a clingstone peach, the flesh clings to the stone and will not release very easy. The freestone peach will separate very easily from the stone when the peach is cut and twisted.

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.

