

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

FAQs from Gardeners at Plant Sale

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: Dr. William M. Johnson

Fruit trees, including peach trees (pictured above), have been putting on a striking display of flowers in many home landscapes across the county. 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 Discovery Garden in Carbide Park from 9:00 - 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, February 22.

The Master Gardener volunteers sponsored a spring plant seminar and sale last Saturday at the Rodeo Area at the County Fairgrounds. Weather conditions on the day of a sale are always a concern. Our bar for ideal weather for the spring plant sale is quite low: no freezing temperatures, no dense fog, no hail and no high winds. Considering how rainy it has been over

the past couple of weeks, the dense clouds on the day of the sale did not take our sunshine away. Even the heavy downpour of rain at 12:00 noon only made Master Gardeners and customers alike smile as we managed to dodge the bullet for most of the sale.

A total of 1,386 customers came to the sale with

each customer looking for plants that would brighten landscapes that have turned dull brown from multi-freezes over the winter season. Customers 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 va-



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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>.

News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.

ieties 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 Discovery Garden from 9:00 - 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, February 22. The Discovery Garden is located in Carbide Park ([4102 Main Street](#)) in La Marque. 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 (galvcountrymgs@gmail.com) or by phone ([281-309-5065](tel:281-309-5065)).

Individuals attending the 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: My peach trees are usually in bloom by mid-January. They only started to bloom in mid-February this year. Why did they bloom so late this year?

A: Most fruit trees require a certain amount of cool winter weather to make them enter a state of dormancy and to promote spring growth when warm temperatures arrive. Peach trees need the cool weather during the winter in order for the buds to develop properly, so the tree will flower and leaf out normally. When extended periods of very cool weather weather con-

ditions occurred over January and February, peach trees remained in a dormant state. This continued state of dormancy is influenced by the number of chill hours accumulated by a peach tree.

The number of cool temperature hours needed by a specific peach variety is known as its chill hour requirement. The lower a peach tree variety's chill hour requirement, the more likely it will set blooms early when extended periods of warm weather conditions occur.

Basically, your peach tree had received sufficient chill hours to be able to bloom. Since daytime temperatures reached the eighty-degree mark last week and have otherwise been warm overall, your peach tree "decided" that spring was here and it's time to bloom.

Our growing area typically receives 500 chill hours to less than 200 chill hours over a winter season depending on the winter and where you live. I asked Master Gardener Herman Auer to send me his latest report for chill hours in our area. As of last week Galveston Island had accumulated 129 chill hours, Hitchcock had accumulated 289 chill hours, Santa Fe had accumulated 454 chill hours, and Friendswood had accumulated 480 chill hours.

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 sufficient size container. 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 (but still produces 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.

Upcoming Programs

Growing Blueberries. 10:00 - 11:30 a.m., Saturday, February 24

How to Grow Native Milkweed for Monarch Butterflies. 1:00 - 3:00 p.m., Saturday, February 24

All programs conducted at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located at [4102-B Main Street](#) (Carbide Park) in La Marque. No fee but pre-registration requested (phone: [281-309-5065](tel:281-309-5065); e-mail galvcountrymgs@gmail.com).