

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

Peach trees not dependably produce tasty fruits for local gardeners. Peach trees and a diverse assortment of other fruit tree will be available at the annual Master Gardener Fruit Tree Sale on Saturday, February 1, at the Wayne Johnson Community Center located in Carbide Park.

I'm about to describe an impromptu conversation that I had someone during a visit to my barber. I was already seated the barber's chair when a gentleman came in and sat in one of the nearby waiting chairs. When he glanced up 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 grapefruits 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" in his home landscape to include peach trees. He 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.



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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 Carbide Park, and I can report all five varieties under evaluation (FlordaKing, MayPride, TexKing, Tropic Beauty and Tropic Snow) dependably produce good yields annually. 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. Cocktail varieties of fruit trees produce several varieties of fruits on a single 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 mouth-watering 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 Saturday, February 1, at the Wayne Johnson Community Center lo-

cated in Carbide Park, 4102 FM 519, in La Marque. A printable map and a full listing of plant varieties to be available are posted on my website (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/>). Heidi Sheesley, of TreeSearch Farms, will provide a seminar on Fruit and Citrus Varieties for the Gulf Coast from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., highlighting the star varieties. The plant sale will be from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 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 fruit trees will be available. Apples, blackberries, blueberries, mulberries, nectarines, pecans, plums and strawberries will be available as well as a diverse selection of citrus ranging from grapefruits to kumquats. Several hard-to-find and exotic fruit trees that grow well in our area will also be available including sapodilla, sapote, sugar apple, dragon fruit and star fruit.

Gardeners Q&A on Freeze-damaged Plants

We have had two significant cold snaps thus far during the winter season including last week's freezing temperatures. I have received an overwhelming number of phone calls and e-mails asking what should be done with freeze-damaged plants. My first e-mail came the morning after the first cold snap occurred and expressed the most common sentiment of area gardeners—the urge to prune back freeze-damaged plants is understandable and widespread. However, I strongly recommend that in most cases people delay pruning. Since the spring growing season will start in is just a few weeks, I urge everyone to delay pruning back plants that sustain freeze injury. Severe pruning should be delayed until new growth appears in spring to ensure that live wood is not removed unnecessarily.

Dead, unsightly leaves may be removed as soon as they turn brown after a freeze if a high level of maintenance is

desired or if your neighborhood association's landscape maintenance patrol is unsympathetic to best landscape management practices recommended by horticultural professionals. Freeze injury may appear as a lack of spring bud break on a portion or all of the plant, or as an overall weak appearance. Branch tips may be damaged while older wood is free of injury. Freeze-injured wood can be identified by examining the cambium layer (food conducting tissue) under the bark for black or brown coloration. Prune these branches below the point of discoloration. Some of the more tender landscape plants such as poinsettia, banana and bird of paradise might be killed back to the ground. But these plants may surprise you by sending up new shoots from the roots in the spring. So, don't give up on them until consistently warm weather arrives. I assure you that patience will pay dividends.

