

Rare Texas Fruit Trees Available at Annual Sale

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

When considering fruit trees to grow in the home landscape, the most likely candidates that come to mind include crisp apples, flavor-bursting citrus and luscious figs, as well as juicy plums and peaches.

The Galveston County Master Gardeners will offer a wide selection of these traditional fruit trees at its upcoming Fruit Tree Sale from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. today at the Wayne Johnson Community Center in Carbide Park (4102 FM 519, La Marque).

I've had several gardeners ask about my Tropic Snow peach. As I reported in an earlier column, it's been a bit tardy in setting blooms this year because of the unusually warm winter.

I conducted a bloom count recently. I don't usually do bloom counts, but I'm pleased to report my Tropic Snow has 18 flowers in full bloom with lots of news buds about to flower.

So, I can anticipate eating homegrown sweet and juicy peaches later during the spring season.

In case you find it difficult to decide on a single variety, we've made it easier by offering a selection of multi-grafted apple trees and multi-grafted peach trees.

A multi-grafted fruit tree has two or more varieties grafted



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

A wide selection of traditional fruit trees like the tropic snow will be offered at the Master Gardeners Fruit Tree Sale at Carbide Park in La Marque.

onto a single rootstock. These specimens are perfect for smaller gardens where a variety of flavors and an extended harvest season are desired.

Multi-grafted fruit trees also are delightfully ornamental when in bloom and can easily be worked into an existing perennial border as well as a small home orchard.

The varieties are labeled on each tree. Care should be taken to preserve each variety when pruning. Prune more vigorous limbs harder to maintain a balanced specimen.

Several types of fruit trees including jaboticaba, macadamia and other hard-to-find fruit trees, that are not as well known but grow well in our Texas Gulf Coast region also will be available at the plant sale.

Jaboticaba

The jaboticaba is a slow-growing large shrub or small, bushy tree. It can reach a height of 10 to 12 feet but will take a long time to get there, and can easily be pruned to keep fruit within reach.

The trees are profusely branched, beginning close to the ground and slanting upward and outward so that the dense, rounded crown can attain an ultimate spread as wide as it is tall.

The thin, beige to reddish bark flakes off much like that of the guava. Jaboticaba makes an attractive landscape plant. The small yellow-white flowers dramatically emerge from the multiple trunks, limbs and large branches in groups of four.

The fruit are grape-like with a



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thick skin and melting pulp. The fruit is dark purple to almost black in color and averages 1 inch in diameter.

Fresh fruit is delicious eaten out-of-hand, but avoid eating huge amounts during a long period of time because of the tannin content.

The gelatinous whitish pulp contains one to four small seeds and has a pleasant, subacid flavor markedly similar to certain muscadine grapes.

They are eaten fresh and made into jams and in wine. The fruit grows on the trunk. They can be frozen whole to enjoy throughout the year.

Jaboticaba is a fairly cold-tolerant tropical, similar to lots of citrus trees.

Although they are cold tolerant to below 26 degrees for short periods of time, they should be protected the first winter by covering and mulching high on the trunk.

If there is going to be a harder freeze in later years, protect the same way.

Fruits are ready to harvest when they have developed a full color and are somewhat soft like a ripe grape.

They are mostly eaten out-of-hand by squeezing the fruit between the thumb and forefinger. The skin will split, and the pulp will slip into the mouth.

Grumichama

This fruit tree (*Eugenia braziliensis*) is a native to Brazil and seems made for the Upper Gulf Coast.

It prefers to be located from sea level to no more than 300 feet, will grow in rich clay soil and is hardy to 26 degrees.

It is highly ornamental in the landscape.

It has a short, stocky trunk and is heavily foliated.

The fruit is quite cherry-like and can be eaten fresh or used in pies, jams and jellies.

Macadamia

These are beautiful trees in the landscape that will average 20 feet by 20 feet in size at maturity.

Once established, they will be evergreen to mid- to low-20s and hardy to high teens. Nuts are commonly used in baking but often are eaten fresh or roasted.

Yes, you can grow this expensive gourmet nut in your own backyard.

Canistel var. 'Bruce'

Canistel is a vigorous, attractive tree native to Central America and well known to the Mayans.

It also is known as egg fruit because the flesh has the color and consistency of a hard-boiled egg yolk. The botanical name for canistel is *Pouteria campechiana*.

It is similar to cooked pumpkin and can be used in pies, milkshakes, pudding and bread, as well as eaten fresh.

It retains its bright yellow color even when frozen — add a bit of sugar, as with berries, before freezing.

Harvest the fruits when fully yellow.

Canistel is easy to grow, requires minimal care and will withstand short exposures to 30 degrees.

