

Plant sale brought out dedicated gardeners

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

The weather predictions could not have been worse for the Master Gardener fruit tree sale Saturday.

Well, perhaps they could have been worse if they had included a freeze or very windy weather in addition to heavy rains.

Clouds hung low and dense fog shrouded Interstate 45 both north and south of Exit 10 in La Marque.

Undaunted, more than 100 Master Gardener volunteers gathered to complete the task of readying the plants and sale site for the crowd they hoped would appear for the 9 a.m. opening. By 8 a.m., the line began to form and by 8:30 a.m., there were more than 85 brave souls patiently waiting for the starting gun."

Drizzle already was falling, and all were decked out in their finest umbrellas and rain ponchos — with no complaining.

The rush at opening was a bit slower because of the weather but no less energetic. Everyone rushed — slippery ground allowing — for the must-have specimens.

Master Gardener volunteers gamely staffed the plant area to direct folks, answer questions and assist with plant toting.

Torrential rain came as predicted. Still, we heard no



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

There are gardeners and then there are gardeners. The serious type appeared in amazing numbers at the plant sale in Carbine Park in La Marque on Saturday.

complaints, and buyers and sellers alike stayed in remarkably good spirits.

My favorite weatherman and Daily News weather blogger, Stan Blazyk, sent us regular weather advisories by text message to his wife, Dr. Margaret Canavan, who has been a longtime Master Gardener.

So, we knew when to expect the next downpour. In case you didn't know, Stan is my weatherman and lives on Galveston Island. If I don't get a weather update from Stan, I don't believe it will happen.

So, what gets people out on a day like that to purchase fruit trees in the rain? I stood by the sales line for a few minutes to ask people "Why did you pick such a miserable day to come out?"

One fellow said he was "determined."

A young woman said she was "stupid" and she produced a delightful smile of accomplishment. Another individual replied she was there "because I wanted that Tropic Snow peach and nothing was going to stop me."

She also explained she already has a producing Tropic Snow peach but wanted more. She also was of the opinion that no other peach was as sweet and flavorful as this variety.

Well, I believe there are gardeners and then there are gardeners — we definitely had the latter and in amazing numbers. Thanks to all who showed up, we had an excellent sale despite the weather.



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The following are questions posed to me by other gardeners at the sale:

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

A: 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 he should put a \$20 tree into a \$20 planting hole. A \$20 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 system.

Save the removed soil because it needs to go back in the 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. That's a brief overview of constitutes a \$20 plant hole.

The gardener also should perform some prep work on the fruit tree before actually planting it. Prune off any broken roots then immerse the root system of the bare-root tree into a bucket of water for at least two hours or overnight.

Plant the tree so the root flare — the area where the uppermost roots meet the trunk — is at ground level or slightly higher.

After filling in the planting hole, lightly

tap the surface with the back end of the shovel to settle and firm the soil. Don't use your foot, as doing so likely will result in excessive soil compaction around the roots.

Q: Will you sell this wagon?

A: The pros and cons of American capitalism has been in the political news during the past several weeks.

The buyer was ready and very willing to pay a very unfair price, but I respectfully declined the offer as wagons already were in short supply.

