

Attend fruit orchard and garden tours

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

The Extension Fruit and Pecan Committee, Texas Master Gardeners and Galveston County Extension Office will co-sponsor a Fruit Orchard and Garden Tour from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday. The program is free and open to the public.

Three fruit orchards are on this year's tour route. You will have the option of touring all three or any single site.

This year's tour sites contain a wide variety of fruit trees ranging from an impressive peach orchard (Fruits 'n' Such Orchard, 6309 Ave. U — Bowerman Drive in Dickinson) to the Master Gardeners Demonstration Orchard in Carbide Park in La Marque. Citrus, figs, apples and other fruit trees can be seen, too.

All sites contain a wide variety of vegetables, too. Vegetables are grown in dozens of raised beds at Carbide Park, whereas vegetables are grown in the ground at Fruits 'n' Such Orchard. Visitors also can tour an impressive herb garden next to the Fruits 'n' Such Orchard in Dickinson. If you're looking for the freshest produce to purchase, you can pick it yourself at Fruits 'n' Such Orchard.

If you have an interest in roses, be sure to visit the display beds of Earth-Kind roses located at the Carbide Park site. Roses have had a centuries-long reputation of being the most neurotic members of the plant world. Homeowners

love their magnificent blooms and fragrance.

Consequently, gardeners spend considerable cash buying fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides to sustain their roses, and much time pruning, deadheading and watering them to keep them blooming. Roses that qualify for the Earth-Kind designation are low-maintenance and perform very well under a variety of growing conditions.

To obtain a map with directions to the tour sites, visit the Galveston County Extension Office, 5115 state Highway 3 in Dickinson. For information, call 281-534-3413, Ext. 2-1. A printable copy of the tour map and more information are available on my website provided at the end of this column (click on the "Extension Educational Programs" link).

Area homeowners who grow — or plan to grow — fruit or vegetables for home use will find the tour sites to be of considerable benefit.

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Gardener's Q&A

Q: What is the difference between native plants and adapted plants, and why are they recommended for landscapes?

A: Native has become the horticultural catchword in past decades. According to the most common definition,

native plants are those that were growing in an area before the arrival of European settlers. Low maintenance is the most obvious benefit of using native plants in your landscape. These plants can tolerate or even thrive under our temperature fluctuations, our extreme heat and humidity and occasional blue Northerners.

As noted before, an important point to understand about native plants is they tend to be low maintenance. However, that does not mean no maintenance.

Because many native plant lists typically include "naturalized" or "adapted plants," the term "native" often is ambiguous and confusing. But adapted plants will work for you, too.

Although local gardeners commonly use the term "native plants," most landscape plants in our area consist of adapted plants since our pre-Columbian growing environment was a coastal prairie. Neighborhood landscape enforcement associations likely would not endorse coast prairie themes.

Adapted plants include plants from other parts of the state and country or even the world. They have similar soil and climate needs and often are considered native because they feel right at home and grow well here. Examples of adapted plants range from Turk's cap (native to Mexico)



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to oleanders (native to the Mediterranean).

The most important thing to remember before purchasing a plant is that Texas is a very big place and just because a plant is identified as a Texas native does not automatically make it a good candidate for our area. A plant that grows happily and carefree in El Paso might be unable to tolerate our spring downpours (spring 2011 being a notable exception) and summer humidity.

On the other hand, a plant that thrives in Savannah, Ga., or Charleston, S.C., might feel right at home in the Galveston-Houston area.

Make sure you understand the plant's cultural needs and whether or not you can meet those needs before you purchase them.

