

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Camille Goodwin

Camille Goodwin of Houston, Texas, shared the photo above on her Facebook page showing her first harvest of Tropic Snow peaches in early June 2013. Peaches and other fruit trees can provide color to local landscapes plus something good to eat.

Last Saturday was just a beautiful day. The bright, sunny sky and mid-sixty degree temperature were just plain ideal.

There was a good turnout for the two gardening seminars conducted at the AgriLife Extension Office on that day. When there is a good crowd at a gardening seminar on such a gardening-friendly day, I know that we are offering something that is valued.

Two individuals at different times approached me and each told me how they ap-

preciated my garden column and spoke about the timeliness of the topics discussed.

While their comments certainly swelled my head and I now must buy a new hat, I felt the pressure of coming up with a timely topic for this column. Discussing the physics of temperatures and air pressure and its effects on an NFL football would be timely but I quickly scratched that as a topic.

After the seminars were finished, I took a casual

stroll through the orchard at the Master Gardener Demonstration Garden on that day in Carbide Park in La Marque. I could almost feel the peach, plum and fig trees were just waiting for that magical signal that tells them it time to start putting on the flowers.

During my stroll, I reminisced about two people in my life for whom I have great admiration. These two men never had an opportunity to meet each other yet they shared strikingly similar philosophies



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about living off the land.

I first thought about Sam Powers, who was a Master Gardener and a friend. Sam resided on a small acreage in Santa Fe. He passed on January 3, 2010. His horticultural knowledge was (and still is) appreciated by many gardeners across the county and beyond. He leaves a gardening legacy that is still cherished to this day.

Sam and Ginger, his spouse, authored a book aptly titled "Our Edible Landscape" in which they chronicled their hilarious and sometimes misbegotten experiences with growing exotic fruit in their residential landscape. They could literally live off the land.

Any season of the year, there would always be something delicious to eat in the yard — loquats, blackberries, peaches, pears, figs, persimmons, jujubes, papayas, star fruit, bananas, pomegranates, monstera — and all kinds of citrus and they shared their bounty with me and anyone else who came to visit. The other person I thought about during my stroll through the orchard was my Dad who passed last spring. My Dad did not grow loquats, jujubes, papayas, star fruit and bananas on the farm because the farm is located in Virginia where nighttime (and daytime) temperatures can dip into the single digits in winter.

As a teenager growing up on a family farm, my morning chores before going to school included feeding the chickens, sows and cows. I rather enjoyed during my chores from late spring to early fall because Dad had the foresight to plant a home fruit orchard. There were four peach varieties, two vari-

eties of cherries, grapes on an arbor, four varieties of apples and three pear trees.

My Dad did not have to plant plums as there was a sizable patch of wild plums that yielded an abundance of sweet and tasty plums. Beyond the orchard was a four-acre vegetable garden. There was something good to eat throughout the growing season. I think I was a pseudo-vegetarian before the term or movement was formally embraced in the USA.

Though separated by miles, both men have imprinted their gardening philosophies on me. I have a loquat, a fig and several bananas growing (and producing well) in my modest size urban landscape. Three citrus trees are nestled within the landscape.

I also have a Tropic Snow peach tree that produced such sweet and tasty fruits, and I am inclined to add another peach tree to the home landscape this year.

Landscaping combines elements of art and science to create a functional, aesthetically pleasing extension of indoor living to the outdoors. Fruit trees, with their form, flowers, fruit, bark, and foliage, may also serve an aesthetic role in the home landscape. Nearly any homeowner can grow a meaningful amount of food in their landscape. Sometimes, the incentive for having fruit trees in your backyard may simply be nostalgic, by sparking fond childhood memories. I'm glad I took that stroll through the orchard last Saturday.

At a Glance

Grow Great Tomatoes: 9:00 - 11:30 a.m., Saturday, January 31. Master Gardener Ira Gervais, our tomato

guru, reveals his secrets to growing great tomatoes in the garden. No fee but pre-registration required (281-534-3413, Ext. 12 or GALV3@wt.net). Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park (4102-B, Main St., La Marque) **Homegrown Blueberries:** 1:00 - 3:00 p.m., Saturday, January 31. Presented by Dr. David Cohen who has an impressive "blueberry patch" as part of his home landscape and has gained considerable hands-on experience with successfully growing blueberries under Upper Gulf Coast growing conditions. No fee but pre-registration required (281-534-3413, Ext. 12 or GALV3@wt.net). Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park (4102-B, Main St., La Marque) **Fruit Trees/Spring Vegetables Sale & Seminar:** Saturday, February 7, Carbide Park's Wayne Johnson Community Center in Carbide Park in La Marque. Sponsored by the Galveston County Master Gardener volunteers. Preview seminar at 8:00 a.m. Sale from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. with many varieties of fruit trees, citrus and spring vegetable transplants. Open to the public; preregistration not required.