

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: Jim Kamas

**Victoria Red is a highly recommended grape variety for coastal areas of Texas. Victoria Red can be grown as an ornamental vine in home landscapes and produces fruit for fresh consumption. Master Gardener David Cooper will lead a grapevine pruning workshop on Thursday, February 28, 2019 from 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.**

The Master Gardener volunteers sponsored a spring plant sale on February 16 at the County Fairground Rodeo Arena.

If you were not able to attend this year's spring plant sale, you will be afforded another opportunity to purchase citrus trees as well as spring veg-

etables at the Discovery Garden in Carbide Park from 9:00 - 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, Feb. 28. Visit the Master Gardeners' website (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/>) for additional details or contact the County Extension Office by e-mail

([galvcountymgs@gmail.com](mailto:galvcountymgs@gmail.com)) or by phone (281-309-5065).

Individuals attending the first plant sale had a variety of questions on growing citrus and other fruit trees. The following is a sampling of the questions asked.



February 27, 2019



Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

*News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.*



**Question: Some of my established peach trees started blooming in January. Why did it bloom so early this time?**

A: Most hardy fruit trees need a certain amount of cool winter weather to end their dormancy and to promote spring growth. Peach trees need the cool weather during the winter in order for the buds to develop properly, so the tree will flower and leaf out normally. Drastic swings in temperatures over the winter season can dramatically speed the onset of blooming.

The number of cool temperature hours needed is known as the chill hour requirement. The lower a tree's chill hour requirement, the more likely it will set blooms early when extended periods of warm weather conditions occur. More information on chill hours is provided in the following question.

Basically, your peach tree had received sufficient cold to be able to bloom. Since temperatures were unusually warm at times over the past few weeks, your peach tree "decided" that spring was here and it's time to bloom. Don't get too upset with your peach tree as lots of other peach trees across the county came to the same conclusion and have been blooming a bit earlier than normal.

The good news is that very little to no cold damage has been sustained by young peaches since temperatures have not dropped down enough or long enough to cause freeze damage.

**Q. What does the term "chill hour requirement" mean?**

A: In order to set fruit, most trees require exposure to a minimum number of hours of temperatures within the range of 32 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit. This temperature range is called "chill hour requirement" and the amount can vary widely for varieties within a given fruit class. The local growing area has a range of 500 chill hours to less than 200 chill hours over a winter season.

If an advertisement claims a fruit tree is hardy to zero for a zillion hours, then don't expect a lot of fruit if you grow it locally. Look for a variety that says it needs "low chill hours" or less than 400 chill hours.

Over the winter season thus far, the Highland Road area of Santa Fe has received 325 hours and the area near Walmart in La Marque has received 332 chill hours. Chill hour values will be less for the southern portion of the county (such as Galveston Island) and higher for the northern portion of the county (such as Friendswood). Chill hour values will also vary from year to year.

**Q: Will citrus trees do well if grown in containers?**

A: That would be a definite YES. Many types of citrus trees will do well in containers if adequate care is provided and if you have a sufficient size container. However, do not expect as big a tree as one

grown in the ground.

Also, it is very important to purchase citrus trees grafted onto Flying Dragon rootstock. This type of rootstock dwarfs the tree (but still produces full size fruit). Citrus grafted onto Flying Dragon rootstock also have a few extra degrees of cold hardiness.

It is important that a large enough container is used—at least a 15-gallon size container should be used for most dwarf-type trees while up to 30-gallon containers should be used for larger size trees. Many gardeners use half whiskey barrel planters (available at many gardening outlets) to grow citrus plants.

Be aware that fruit and citrus trees grown in containers must be watered often and throughout the year including the winter season.

### Grape Pruning Demonstration

**WHAT:** How to prune grapes . . . a hands-on demonstration

**WHEN:** Thursday, Feb. 28, from 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

**WHERE:** Discovery Garden located in Carbide Park (4102 Main Street, La Marque)

**WHO:** Master Gardener David Cooper will lead a hands-on demonstration on pruning grape vines. Participants are welcome to bring their pruners and pruning gloves.

