

Fruit Trees in the Landscape

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The selection of fruit trees at area nurseries is high and it is an excellent time to plant them. Some fruit trees are easy to grow and some are difficult.

Among the easiest to grow are pomegranate. The tough plants produce a nutritious fruit with a hard shell that is eaten fresh, juiced and used to flavor recipes. Pomegranates tolerate our alkaline soil, are drought tolerant, and do not require a spray program to control insects or diseases. There is a wide selection of varieties of pomegranate available at area nurseries. Pick a variety for your landscape based on final size of the plant, size of the fruit, and whether it has edible seeds or not. "Wonderful" the most common selection over the years makes a thick shrub that grows to 12 feet tall. Its fruit can reach softball size and most gardeners do not consume the seed. Here in Central Texas "Wonderful" seems to be erratic in its production. Other selections to consider are "Pink Satin" "Kandahar" and "Texas Pink". Visit plantanswers.com for descriptions of the varieties or review the variety list at your favorite nursery.

Grow pomegranates in full sun. In addition to the fruit, the plant produces an attractive red-orange bloom that is showy for a long period in April and May. Deer do not eat pomegranate foliage and stems in my neighborhood.

Peaches are much more difficult to grow. Select a peach variety based on chill hours required. Chill hours are the hours in the winter where temperatures are between 32 degrees and 45 degrees. Peaches need the cool weather to recharge their chemistry. Our area is notorious for the variation in cold weather we get from winter to winter. Select a high chill peach and you may not get fruit every year. Low chill peaches are more reliable but the fruit quality is less.

"Florida King" at 450 hours chill is a reliable producer. "Junegold" at 650 hours has an early large fruit and is surprisingly reliable. "La Feliciana" is a large freestone that produces at 550 hours of chill that ripens at the end of June.

Peaches do not prosper in caliche or heavy clays. Grow them on raised beds in full sun. An 8ft. by 8ft. square works well. The irrigation must be reliable and the drainage good. Peaches do best if they are pruned every year. To control insects and diseases a weekly spray program is advisable.

Satsuma mandarins are somewhere in a middle level of difficulty between pomegranates and peaches. The evergreen trees grow to 12 ft. tall when planted in the ground and are protected from temperatures below 26 degrees. They also make an excellent container tree if planted in a half whiskey barrel or other large container.

Satsumas sometimes have scale insects to contend with but the main issue is cold weather. Young trees and those in containers need to be covered in extremely cold weather in order to escape damage. A good strategy is to put the container on wheels or to plant the satsuma in a sheltered location in full sun. The south side of the house works well.

For an extra few degrees of cold tolerance select one of the varieties such as "Orange Frost" or "Arctic Frost"

For more information on the characteristics of the varieties of pomegranates, peaches, and satsumas, and information on growing other fruit species visit plantanswers.com. Apples, pears, plums, nectarines, apricots, persimmons, jujube, limes, grapefruit, lemons, oranges, figs, avocados are among those tree fruits that can be considered.