

Backyard Fruit Continued

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Last week we discussed peaches and citrus. This week we will cover figs, blackberries, apples, pears, pomegranate, and oriental persimmon.

Figs are easy to grow in the San Antonio area. They can grow to over 12 feet tall and 12 feet around. Figs do well in a raised bed but will grow in native soil if they receive adequate irrigation. If temperatures are high and the rains and irrigation are inadequate the plant may stop maturing fruit that already is on the tree. Insect pests and diseases are not usually a problem. Sometimes a fig growing in sand will become infested with nematodes but not often. Birds and other wildlife will, however, expect to share your fig crop with you. In a bountiful production year that is usually not a problem.

There are several fig varieties from which to select. Celeste, Brown Turkey, and Alma are good choices. Figs do not require regular pruning or pesticide sprays.

Blackberries are not as easy to grow in our gardens as figs, but they are usually worth the effort. Each year after the crop in May and June is harvested, the existing canes(stems) decline and in time for next year's crop the new canes emerge. The tough part of this growth pattern is that the spent canes must be removed to make room for the new canes. The canes are thorny and tangled so the yearly pruning exercise can be challenging. Thornless selections have been bred and are available, except in my experience they do not seem to remain productive over the long-term. The varieties Brazos and Kiowa are my favorite. They have thorns. Rooted blackberry plants are available at most nurseries. It also works to transplant roots from a productive, existing bed. Some years stinkbugs will invade your crop. Control them by using malathion or Sevin according to label instructions. Again, the birds will want to share your crop with you. As harvest nears the bird access can be reduced with a bird netting.

Apples are a popular fruit for backyard planting but don't expect to produce bright red, crisp flesh, Red Delicious apples. Our hot weather limits our choice of varieties to low chill selections such as Dorset Golden and Anna that bloom at the same time and provide pollen for each other. Apples in San Antonio don't seem to survive long unless they are planted in irrigated raised beds. Apples do best if they are pruned each year to form a balanced central leader shape and are sprayed on a regular basis for insects and diseases. Neither the pest control or pruning attention required of apples is as demanding as peaches. Plantanswers.com includes more details about fruit tree care, including pruning diagrams.

Just as Red Delicious apples and Elberta peaches, the most well-known peach and apple selections, don't grow well in the San Antonio area, Bartlett pears are also not recommended. The limiting factor on pears is the disease, fire blight. To escape the problem, plant a resistant variety such as Kieffer, Orient, or LeConte. Grow pears in a raised bed like apples or peaches. They do not require much pruning and the recommended varieties do not require a spray program.

The recommended plum varieties for this area are Methley and Santa Rosa. Like peaches and pears, they do not require a cross-pollinator. Plant your plum tree on a raised bed irrigated with drip irrigation. Plums require a pruning and spray program to produce the maximum number of high-quality fruits, but they are not as demanding as peaches and live longer, even with less attention.

There are many pomegranate selections to choose from. Each variety offers a slight difference in plant size and fruit ripening dates. "Wonderful" is the commercial variety grown in California, but you will do best here in Texas if you grow Pink Satin, Texas Pink, Kandahar Early or Salavatski. Most years pomegranates will mature their fruit in the fall without the need to spray the fruit for insects or diseases. They grow acceptably in our native soil. In my neighborhood the deer do not eat pomegranate stems and foliage. Pomegranate blooms are very showy and long-lasting in April and May.

Oriental persimmon is a very attractive slow-growing tree. The fruit looks like ornaments placed on the branches for decoration. Grow oriental persimmon without pruning or a spray program. The variety Fuyu is non-astringent so it can be eaten before it is mushy ripe. Tamopan and Hachiya are astringent varieties. In my experience oriental persimmon grows best in raised beds.