**No Spray Fruits**

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The traditional fruits—apples, peaches, plums, and pears— can be grown in San Antonio on raised beds with drip irrigation and an ambitious spray program but there are some excellent plants that can be grown with less attention: blackberries, figs, Japanese persimmons and pomegranates.

Blackberries produce their fruit in late spring (May and June) on vines that grow well in raised beds or even in most native soils. Most area nurseries have blackberries in 1 gallon containers for transplanting or they can even be planted as a bare root.

Recommended varieties that have done well in our area for years include Brazos and Roseborough. A relatively new variety, Kiowa, has outperformed Brazos and Roseborough in test trials. It produces its fruit late in the summer. Any of the three selections would perform well.

Blackberries have several challenging characteristics to consider. They are thorny and the old stems should be removed each year after the fruit is harvested. The fruit is produced on new wood. If the old stems are not removed, the bed can become a tangled mess. It can become unpleasant to harvest the fruit. Blackberries also spread aggressively. Control the spread by removing stems that appear outside the designated bed.

There are thornless blackberries that have been developed in Arkansas. Varieties such as Natchez, Navaho and Arapaho are thornless. Unfortunately, in my experience, the thornless varieties are later blooming and seem to decline after a few years in our hot summers.

Figs grow well and are productive in our area. Plant them in full sun and allow plenty of space. A mature fig can grow to 12 feet tall and 12 feet in diameter.

Figs will survive drought weather once they are established but for maximum fruit production, they need a generous supply of water. Increase their efficiency by applying 6 to 12 inches of mulch to the plants under and beyond the entire crown.

There are a number of good figs to select from. Brown turkey and Texas everbearing are the easiest to find and are good producers of medium size brown figs for a May and autumn harvest. Also look for Celeste for pink flesh and Alma for a large June harvest.

Pomegranates are all the rage because of their few calories, high nutritional value fruit and juice. Pomegranates are also easy to grow in our native soil and seem to be deer proof in many neighborhoods. In addition, pomegranate blooms are very decorative. They appear in April and May and provide orange/red color over a period of 4-6 weeks.

Wonderful is the most common selection and was the only one on the market for many years. Pomegranates make a large shrub or small tree. Now, however, your nursery probably offers red silk, ambrosia, Austin, pink satin, Kandahar and many other selections. The selections are different based on fruit size, seed edibility and inclination to grow as a shrub or tree. Ask to view the nurseries description of the varieties they offer.

There are ornamental pomegranates that are dwarf size. They do well as a blooming landscape plant but the fruit quality is not comparable to the larger selections.

Grow pomegranates in full sun in native soil.

Oriental persimmon is another easy-to-grow fruit that makes an excellent landscape plant. The small trees have an attractive round crown that is especially showy when it is loaded with the orange, yellowish or red fruit.

Fuyu is the most popular selection because the fruit is not as astringent as Hachiya, Tamopan and Tamenashi. Harvest Fuyu when it is firm ripe and the rest when they are mushy ripe.

Grow oriental persimmons in native soil in full sun. The tree is a slow grower but will eventually grow to 15-20 feet tall depending on the selection.