**Citrus and Pomegranate**

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The best selection of the traditional fruit trees is usually available in spring. A survey of local nurseries this fall indicates that the selection of peaches, apples, pears and plums is in fact pretty skimpy, but there is a good supply of citrus and pomegranate trees. For my money, those are probably better choices overall for backyard fruit production. Citrus and pomegranates are easy to grow, are long lived, do not require frequent sprays, are very productive, and make attractive landscape plants.

Citrus have fragrant blooms that are borne on the attractive waxy, evergreen foliage. The plants are dense and make good tall hedges for full sun if you grow them in the ground.

The most popular citrus tree is the Satsuma mandarin. There are many selections and all produce easy to peel, mostly seedless fruits that ripen in October and November.

There are two new selections that are available on the market in limited numbers this fall—“Orange Frost” and “Bumper.” They are actually Satsuma/Changsha tangerine crosses. They both retain the large fruit size, seedless and easy to peel characteristics of the parent Satsuma and they have several desirable characteristics from the Changsha as well.

The “Orange Frost” has inherited the superior cold tolerance of the Changsha tangerine. Satsuma has good cold tolerance (25-26 oF) to begin with, but “Orange Frost” may have another 4-5 oF according to Jerry Parsons, a member of the Extension Service team that tested the new selection. “Orange Frost” reportedly has a more acidic taste than the normal Satsuma. It is the selection for gardeners that feel Satsuma has a bland flavor.

“Bumper” has the tang from the Changsha, and it is also more precocious and productive than the other Satsuma selections. That may be hard to believe for gardeners that already brag on the production from the older selections. That’s what the research results show, however. The research also shows that “Bumper” has normal Satsuma cold tolerance.

There is limited distribution of the two new selections, so you may have to call around to find them. In fact, calling around to your favorite nurseries is a good way to find out what citrus varieties are available at the various nurseries.

The best selections for containers (half whiskey barrels) are Meyer lemon and Mexican lime, but kumquats and calamondin also work well. Use the small fruit from the two species for cooking, drinks. They are both very cold tolerant.

Citrus planted in containers will only grow to about 4 feet tall. Use them as decoration on your patio. It is great to go out on the patio and harvest a lime or lemon for a guest’s drink in the fall and to experience the citrus perfume over the long bloom period in the later winter and spring.

Plant the larger citrus, such as oranges, grapefruit, Changsha tangerine, and Satsuma, in full sun in the ground. They are not fussy about soil and are drought tolerant, but even the hardiest can be defoliated by extreme cold weather. The best location for planting is on the south side of the house where they are relatively sheltered.

Calamondin, kumquats, Changsha tangerine, and the “Orange Frost” Satsuma are the most cold tolerant. Satsuma is also tolerant, followed by oranges, grapefruit, lemons and limes.

I protect my limes, lemons, and grapefruits from cold weather with a new product called “Planket”. Oranges and tangerines can also be protected. The plasticized fabric comes in many sizes, including 8 feet and 10 feet diameter round pieces that are perfect for citrus trees. Cloth blankets or plastic tents, also work for freeze protection. If the forecast calls for temperatures under 26 oF, the cold protection can be enhanced with a string of holiday lights, a heat lamp or a mechanic’s light under the tent.

Pomegranates do not require cold protection. They are deciduous, multi-stemmed shrubs or trees (depending on the selection) that grow 12 to 16 feet tall. “Wonderful” is the most common selection for fruit production, but there are many more choices, including “Red Silk,” “Kashmir Blend” and “Garnet Sash” that have edible seed. Pomegranate juice is all the rage for individuals seeking a nutritious, flavorful addition to a healthy diet. The fruit is great, but my favorite attribute of pomegranate is the spectacular orange blooms that decorate the plants in April.