**Weekly Express-News Article**

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**Easy Fruit to Grow**

Figs, oriental persimmons and pomegranates are fruit to grow if you want production without having to spray pesticides. They also have value as landscape plants.

Pomegranate juice is all the rage because of its nutritional value and sweet/tart taste. The plant is also easy to grow with some excellent landscape attributes.

The most popular pomegranate variety “Wonderful” is usually a multi-stem shrub that grows to 12 feet tall. Pomegranate is deciduous and some years show’s some good fall color but the most attractive parts of the plant are the blooms and the fruit.

Pomegranates begin to bloom in April. The flowers can last into June. The flower is tennis ball size with multi layers of glow-in-the-dark red orange petals. The fruit that follows looks a bit like an apple with a jester’s cap.

The outer covering of the fruit is reddish and shell like. Imagine an eggshell, only less brittle and more flexible. For many years pomegranate fruit has been used in arts and crafts work. With a coat of shellac the fruit is decorative and long lasting.

Pomegranates produce best in full sun with regular irrigation. The plant is, however, a good xeriscape plant and will grow in the shade. In my neighborhood pomegranates have naturalized and do not seem to be eaten by the deer. Pomegranates are generally insect and disease free. Squirrels will eat the fruit.

In addition to “Wonderful” consider the following selections.

* Garnet Sash can be pruned to tree form. It produces large, dark red fruit with generally edible seeds.
* Red Silk also has edible seeds but is less tart. It makes a naturally semi-dwarf spreading tree. Its fruit is medium size and pinkish red.
* Kashmir Blend also produces a medium size fruit that has a light pinkish red exterior. The edible seeds have an intense flavor.
* Ambrosia has a large pale pink fruit with large seeds. It is a juicing favorite.
* Sharp Velvet is a late pomegranate, ripening in October. The fruit is dark red.

In addition to the full size, fruit producing selection, mid size and dwarf pomegranates are available as ornamental shrubs.

Oriental persimmon is another low maintenance fruit producing plant that makes a great addition to the landscape. Like pomegranate there are several selections from which to choose.

Fuyu is the most popular variety in our area because it does not have to be mushy ripe to reach its full sweetness. It is a slow growing small tree that has a disciplined round crown with horizontal branching. When it is full of the tangerine size shiny red fruit it looks like the Christmas bulbs have been placed on the tree in a uniform pattern for their decorative value. The tree will eventually reach 10 feet tall and 8 feet wide.

Hachiya is another popular variety. Its fruit is seedless and cone shaped with a bright orange red skin. The tree is more upright than Fuyu and the fruit is more astringent. The fruit needs to be fully ripe to eat. One of the best strategies with astringent oriental persimmons is to let them ripen fully and then freeze them until you want to eat one. They are also used in recipes.

Tamopan is even more upright than Hachiya and probably the fastest growing persimmons. The fruit is orange and very flat with a distinctive ring constriction near the middle of the fruit.

All of the oriental persimmons are drought tolerant and relatively pest free. They are deciduous with excellent fall color.

Figs have leaves that can be as large as a man’s glove. The plants grow very fast with an inclination to be a large multi-stem shrub. They are relatively easy however to prune to form a single main trunk with a large round crown.

Figs produce best in full sun but will grow in varying degrees of shade. They will use as much water as you give them even though they can survive through drought conditions. The most productive figs are mulched to 8 inches deep and receive irrigation every week.

The Celeste produces a large crop of small brown/purple figs on a large plant. It produces fruit on old wood so should not be pruned heavily.

Texas Everbearing produces a larger fruit that requires 60 days to ripen. Its plant is also vigorous. Texas Everbearing will produce fruit more readily on current season’s growth than Celeste.

Alma is a less aggressive plant than either Texas Everbearing or Celeste but is more freeze sensitive. Its fruit is medium sized and cream colored.

Birds and squirrels love figs so expect them to want to share. The varieties recommended in this article have a closed eye so insect penetration should not be a problem.