**The Best Fruits for San Antonio**

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After 23 years of growing fruit trees in San Antonio, I have revised my opinion of the best fruits to grow in our area.

My favorites are now satsumas, pomegranate, oriental persimmons and blackberries.

Satsumas are mandarin oranges. They top the list because of their fruit, their landscape value and the relative ease of growing them.

The plants are evergreen with large shiny leaves. The flowers are white and showy with an excellent fragrance. The fruit is also attractive.

If the tree is planted in the ground, it will grow to 10 or 12 feet and produce several bushels of fruit most years. In a container such as a half whiskey barrel, my plants have grown to about 3.5 feet and produce about a half bushel of fruit.

Satsumas are drought-tolerant but to produce a maximum amount of baseball-size fruit, they need to receive regular irrigation. Fertilize the trees every spring and they will do their thing.

The major cultural issue is that Satsuma, like all citrus, is sensitive to cold. Satsuma, however, is more cold tolerant than most other citrus. As long as temperatures stay above 26 degrees, the trees should survive. As a precaution, cover them with a “planket” or other freeze protection at about 28 degrees.

Pomegranate fruit is in favor because of the low calorie, anti-oxidant nature of the juice. The fruit is decorative. It reminds me of a jester’s head complete with hat. Hobbyists shellac the fruit and use it for crafts.

Wonderful is the commercial variety, but most nurseries now offer a large number of selections. Select the variety for the size and growth habit of the plant as well as the maturity date, flavor, fruit size and seed edibility.

Wonderful makes a thick, upright shrub of 12 feet tall. Other varieties are smaller and more tree-like.

Pomegranate doesn’t have disease or insect pests unless squirrels and birds learn to break into the hard-shelled fruit. The fruit on the plant is decorative but the showiest part of the plant is the large orange-red blooms that often last for six weeks in late spring.

Oriental persimmon makes a decorative small tree for the landscape. The crown is uniform with horizontal branching. When the orange or red baseball-size fruit is hanging on the tree, it looks almost artificial because of the color and spacing.

Of the varieties to choose from, only Fuyu has a fruit that is usable before it gets mushy ripe. The others are very astringent until they become mushy. A good way to use them is to freeze the fruits and take them out of the freezer when you want to eat it.

Blackberries are not a tree fruit but they are productive and easy to grow in San Antonio. Plant in full sun in your raised bed. Blackberries spread so one plant every 3 feet is plenty. They bloom in spring and the fruit is ready to harvest in April.

Brazos is the old reliable variety but Kiowa is getting rave reviews. The thornless selections don’t produce very well in our climate.

The hardest part of growing blackberries is pruning out the old canes to make room for the new canes. This should be done every summer after the berries are harvested. Wear your gloves and a long sleeve shirt to survive the thorns.