

Grow Fruits to Enjoy in Fall Garden



Photo by Auburn University: The satsuma is one of many fruits that can add to your backyard garden harvest.

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Fall is officially right around the corner, and even though the temperatures may have us still lounging in the shade with our lemonade, it's time to consider the bounty of harvest time. We're not talking hayrides here, but fruiting trees that you might consider as a means to enhance both your landscape and your menu. There are a surprising number of choices to consider when seeking to extend your fruit season into fall.

One of the most nutritious fruits ripening in October and November is the Asian persimmon. In addition to being seedless and self-fertile, many varieties are semi-dwarf or dwarf trees. You can probably find a spot in your small space for at least one. About half the varieties are NON-astringent, meaning you can eat them while the flesh is still firm and crisp. If you haven't experienced these, you owe it to yourself to sample a few. Persimmons are relatively easy to grow and make lovely specimen trees, with bright red fall foliage. When the leaves have all fallen, the fruit still hangs among the branches like cheerful orange ornaments.

Two fall fruits that figure highly in ancient stories are the quince and the pomegranate. In fact, these vie for the title of the true "forbidden fruit". With all the publicity about the health benefits of pomegranates, it would be hard to ignore them, but it may not have occurred to you that you could easily grow your own. Showy orange flowers on the small willow trees add to their appeal, and there are a number of varieties to choose from.

Nuts are a natural thought for fall, as any squirrel can tell you. There are an abundance of pecan trees here, but how about planting a handsome chestnut tree? You need two for good pollination, but they are among the grandest shade trees known. We can also grow black walnuts here, which are highly valued for their intense flavor, if not their exceedingly hard husks.

Many varieties of citrus are at the peak of perfection in mid- to late fall. At one time the Gulf Coast was an important citrus growing area, and the old cold-hardy varieties are still around. Once they get past the “baby” stage and have a few inches diameter on their trunks, there are several varieties of tangerines, oranges and lemons that are cold-hardy down to the mid-teens. Kumquats are among the hardiest citrus, and a delicious favorite as well as a fabulous ornamental.

Maybe you’d like to venture into a more exotic realm. If you’d like an evergreen fruiting tree that’s also drought-tolerant and easy, consider an olive or a pineapple guava. The fruit of pineapple guava is small but delicious, falling from the tree in October. The tree can be pruned as a formal hedge or left to grow into a full-sized specimen, to about 20-25’ tall. The best olive tree for our area is Arbequina, a small black Spanish olive. They grow fast and bear while quite young, adding old-world character and charm to your landscape.

Another very interesting fruit ripening in early fall is the jujube, also known as Chinese date. Shiny chestnut brown and about the size of a date, the flesh inside is firm and somewhat like an apple in texture and taste. Jujube makes a lovely shade tree, with its shiny willowy leaves and gnarly trunk.

We’re fortunate to live in a zone that allows a wide range of fruit-planting possibilities. This fall, plan a visit to a nursery with expertise in fruits to introduce yourself to these and many more delicious choices for your edible landscape. Surprise yourself!

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