

Consider Using Fruit Trees in your Landscape



Photo special to the Democrat: Fruit trees, such as this Oriental persimmon, can be colorful additions to the landscape.

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I have always wondered why I don't see many fruit trees used in landscaping. I think it is a shame that so many beautiful fruit trees are passed over for common trees such as oaks, cedars, and sycamores. When I have posed the question of utilizing fruit trees in landscapes, I am always given a number of reasons for banishing fruit trees from the landscape and relegating them to orchards.

The most common reason I hear is that fruit trees are too big. I don't see this as a valid cause when there are so many dwarf varieties of fruit trees available. Also, by practicing good pruning techniques one can keep most fruit trees to a reasonable size. Even in really narrow spaces, fruit trees can be espaliered (espalier is French meaning "to rest the shoulder") on the side of a building, along a fence or on a trellis.

I'm also told that fallen fruits and leaves are messy. Fruit trees can be strategically located away from walkways and driveways in areas where the fallen leaves can decay and return organic matter to the soil or they can be collected and composted. Keep in mind that all trees will shed some or all of their leaves within a year. Even our treasured live oaks are messy in the spring. Southern magnolias, even though evergreen, are shedding their leaves now, too.

It is often said that fruit trees need lots of sunlight. This is true for some, but there are a number of fruit trees that will do well in areas with limited sunlight. The ones that immediately come to mind are pawpaw, persimmon, some types of citrus, fig, jujube and pomegranate.

A landscaper once told me that fruit trees are hard to maintain. I will admit that maintenance of some fruit trees can pose a challenge and may tend to require a little more attention. But the payoff for the extra effort far outweighs the input. One of the most rewarding things in a human's life is the satisfaction garnered from reaping the fruits of our labor.

Fruit trees, like other landscape trees, make excellent screens and borders for boundaries. They provide shade and buffer noise. And if that's not enough, some fruit trees such as citrus, cherry, and peach provide beautiful, fragrant flowers before they fruit. Even more beautiful to me, though, is a fruit tree laden with ripe fruits. Take citrus, for example. In spring, the citrus tree is in full bloom, and the perfume of the delicate blossoms fills the air as bees methodically dance from flower to flower. As the season changes and we move into summer the dark green leaves will create a sanctuary for birds and other animals. And then finally, during the winter the tree is adorned with orange or yellow fruit, depending the kind of citrus. Most fruit trees are similar, providing four seasons of beauty.

It may seem odd to some people to put fruit trees in your landscape instead of traditional hardwood and flowering trees. But with fruit trees, you will not only enjoy the flowers and fruits, but you will also help your children make the connection between food and trees. And, finally, it is an established fact that a well maintained fruit tree can add value to your property in the eyes of many potential buyers.

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