

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham

“The Pomegranate Tree: A Wise Choice for Central Texas “

If you are shopping for a medium size, long-lived tree that adapts well to our central Texas climate and soil, produces an attractive flower as well as a fruit that is both edible and useful in decorations, the Pomegranate tree may a wise selection for you. This native to Iran and India was introduced into California by Spanish settlers in 1769 and has since become an important fruit crop plant as well as a popular tree selection for parks and home gardens.

The Pomegranate tree is a neat, rounded, small tree that typically grows from 12 to 16 feet in height. It is self-pollinating as well as cross-pollinated. Although typically deciduous, in warmer climates like ours the glossy, leathery leaves stay on the tree. The attractive carnation-like scarlet, white, or variegated flowers are over an inch across and have 5 to 8 crumpled petals as well as a red, fleshy, tubular calyx, which persists on the fruit.

The nearly round fruit is typically 2 ½ to 5 inches wide. Its skin is usually yellow overlaid with light or deep pink or rich red. The fruits are ripe when they have developed a distinctive color and make a metallic sound when tapped. The fruits must be picked before over maturity when they tend to crack open, particularly when rained on. Membranous walls separate the fruit's interior and white spongy tissue (rag) into compartments packed with transparent sacs (arils) filled with tart, flavorful, juicy, red, pink or whitish pulp. In each sac there is one white or red, angular, soft or hard seed. The seeds represent about 52% of the weight of the whole fruit. The entire sac (aril) is consumed raw. Deeply scoring it several times vertically and then breaking it apart will allow access to the fruit out of hand. The clusters of juice sacs are then lifted out and eaten.

Pomegranate trees do best in well-drained ordinary soil, but they will also thrive in calcareous soils as well as rocky ground. Applications of 2 to 4 ounces of ammonium sulfite fertilizer the first two springs are recommended. Insect pests include the Pomegranate Butterfly and Leaf-footed bug. Although they are drought resistant, newly planted trees should be watered every 2 to 4 weeks during the dry season. Good fruit production requires regular irrigation. It is important to know that not all Pomegranate trees bear fruit. Some are only ornamental. One of the fruiting varieties found on the market is “Wonderful”.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact

ask.bcmga@gmail.com

