

Ornamental Trees With Tasty Fruit

By IVA NEWMAN

When speaking of fruit trees, most folks visualize the traditional orchard favorites such as peaches, apples, apricots, plums and pears. These are all deciduous trees, grown throughout the country and the world.

Here on the Peninsula, however, we have a climate that permits the growing of other types of fruit trees, evergreens which hold on to their foliage throughout the winter and which, if you select the proper varieties, might yield fruit on a year-around basis.

Included in these, of course, are the citrus varieties which are widely grown here on both dwarf and standard rootstocks. One or another of these is always ripening its crop and no more succulent a crop exists anywhere.

Right now, however, we would like to pass on some notes we have made on some of the lesser known evergreen, fruiting plants which are enjoyed both for their ornamental value in the garden as well as for their tasty fruits.

At the top of the list is the

guava, a group of perhaps 150 species of the genus *Psidium* (pronounced sid-i-um), all tropical American shrubs and trees. Some three or four of these are widely cultivated in warm regions for their fruit, which is the common guava and the source of such widely used products as guava jelly and guava paste (the guayabada of the Brazilians). The fruit of the guava, eaten fresh, is said to be helpful in preventing crippling arthritis, however, we have not been able to substantiate this claim.

All of these guavas are medium-sized trees or tall shrubs with rather large showy flowers with quite prominent stamens. The fruits are somewhat pear or egg-shaped but vary in size according to variety. The guava gets its botanical name of *Psidium* from the Greeks who thought the fruits resembled the pomegranate so much it must be one. *Psidium* is Greek for pomegranate.

Pineapple Guava Popular

According to the California Association of Nurserymen the most popular of the guavas is the pineapple guava, *Feijoa sellowiana*. This one is native to South America and is considered the hardiest of the guavas. Allowed to grow naturally it will make a large shrub about 16 feet tall and as broad as tall, if not trained, or killed back by frost. However, it responds extremely well to pruning and can be trained to suit the needs of the garden, be it an espalier, a flat screen or hedge or a small tree. Pruning should be done in late spring.

The pineapple guava has oval leaves two to three inches long that are glossy green above and silvery white underneath. The unusual flowers are about an

inch in diameter, have four fleshy white petals and a big tuft of showy red stamens. The petals are edible and very decorative when used on fruit salads. The blooms open in May or June and the fruits ripen six to seven months later depending upon the weather. Fruits, in this area, are about two inches long, oval shaped, gray-green in color and filled with a soft, pineapple-flavored pulp. We enjoy the flavor of the fruits grown on the Peninsula over those grown in hotter areas. If planning to grow just one plant choose 'Coilidge' or 'Pineapple Gem' as neither of these need cross-pollination.

The Strawberry guava, *Psidium cattleianum*, makes a large open shrub or an attractive small tree to about fifteen feet. It has glossy, dark green leaves with a slight bronze cast at the tips. Blossoms are white, about one inch in diameter with a mass of stamens in the center. The blooms resemble those of the myrtle, the family to which the guavas belong. The flowers are followed by roundish, one-and-a-half inch fruits that are a deep purplish-red. However, the flesh of the fruits is white.

The Lemon guava, *P. guajava*, makes a taller, more open plant with larger leaves and larger fruits. These are yellow in color with a musky flavor. They are much less showy than the two above and the fruits less tasty.

Guava plants fruit at an early age and bear regularly and abundantly if fertilized annually and watered two or three times during our dry period. The fruits are high in mineral value and vitamin C, it is important in the diet but because of the characteristic odor of the fruit not everyone enjoys it fresh.

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