

July 31, 2001

Alien Invasion

By Dale Norrington

From exotic and far-away lands, tropical and subtropical fruits have staged an insidious, rather well-received invasion of the welcoming Mediterranean climate of the central coast. They offer to delight the culinary palate, and add unusual forms and textures to the garden design palette. While avocados, figs, and citrus have long been favorites, many others, less often seen in the home garden, may well be worthy of consideration. Kiwi fruit, or Chinese gooseberry, litchi, guava, mango, white sapote, babaco, tamarillo, carambola and others have the potential to do well in many parts of our county. Named varieties are available, and seeds from purchased fruit can sometimes be germinated.

Broad-leaf evergreen macadamia nut trees may be considered in locations with full sun or part shade, and clay or sandy soils. With a tolerance to frost similar to that of citrus and avocado, they can tolerate a bit more heat. They will naturally grow to 40 feet in height with a 30 foot width, and can be pruned or hedged.

Cherimoya, described by Mark Twain as "deliciousness itself", is produced on 'nearly' evergreen trees with medium sized leaves and a soft, lime-green, tropical look to 20 feet in height. They will accept pruning and generally perform better in gardens with a temperature moderating ocean influence. Hand pollination is recommended to improve fruit quality.

Papaya plants are large-leafed, fast-growing, tree-like herbs. Papaya seeds from purchased fruit may be germinated immediately, or air-dried and stored for several months. January and February are preferred planting times. They may be started in pots or flats and set out after danger of frost has passed. Protection from cold is recommended, particularly as fruit is ripening. Stems are soft and break easily. Protection from wind is thus also recommended. A good internet source for more informatin is the California Rare Fruit Growers Fruit Facts at <http://www.crfg.org/pubs/frtfacts.html>. This link is to sites outside of the UC domain. No endorsement is intended of products, services or information, nor is criticism implied of similar sites not mentioned.

University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Volunteers can provide additional gardening information upon request. Call the San Luis Obispo office at 781-5939 on Mondays and Thursdays from 1 to 5 PM. You may also call the Paso Robles office at 237-3100 on Wednesdays from 8 AM to 12 PM. The Paso Robles Library Master Gardener community outreach program is available to gardeners on Mondays from 10 AM to noon. The Master Gardener e-mail address is mastergardener@co.slo.ca.us.