LOQUAT: A SUBTROPICAL RELATIVE OF THE APPLE, PEAR AND PEACH

By Ralph E. Mitchell, *Charlotte County Extension Service Director/Horticulture Agent*

One really great subtropical fruit related to apples, pears, and peaches that grows well in our area is the Loquat. I see the fruit beginning to change color as we get closer to late February through March when the fruit is usually ripe. The Loquat, also known as the Japanese plum or Japanese medlar, is a common, but often under-appreciated small tree. Originally grown in China for about a thousand years, this handsome tree was introduced to Florida around 1879 where it is mainly a door yard fruit. While loquats are not a crop in Florida, California actually has some small-scale commercial loquat production. I think that you will find the loquat both an ornamental tree and a source of tasty fruit in season.

Loquats can grow up to 25 feet tall with long leaves (up to 12 inches) that are dark green and leathery to the touch. White fragrant flowers appear from October to February from the rounded canopy of this evergreen tree. Loquats make great trees where overhead space is limited or as a specimen tree or a patio shade tree. While able to tolerate partial shade, this tree will do best in full sun and accommodates nicely to our higher pH soils. Be careful not to over-fertilize these trees as this can make them more open to attack by fire blight, a disease of plants related to pears. If ornamental foliage is your main goal, try a cultivar called 'Coppertone' which has copper-colored new foliage with pale pink flowers. Another interesting cultivar available is 'Variegata', which, as its name implies, has white and green variegated leaves. There is even a species of loquat called Eriobotrya deflexa or Bronze Loquat which has bright red-bronze or coppery color foliage when young, but small inedible fruit.

If fruit is what you are looking for, there are several selected cultivars that provide superior tasting fruit. Keep in mind that loquats can easily be propagated by seed. However, these plants do not produce true from seed and may take up to six years to bear. Superior grafted varieties that produce ripe fruit from March through June include 'Champagne' with yellow-skinned, white-fleshed, tart fruit; 'Emanuel' with mildly sweet, good flavored fruit and 'Wolfe' which is sweet-tart, with a good spicy flavor. These grafted Loquats will begin to produce in 1-2 years. Check out Loquat Growing in the Florida Home Landscape at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG050 for a complete list of recommended loquat varieties and their particular characteristics.

Loquat fruits are excellent eaten fresh or made into jelly, jam, preserves and pies. The oval to rounded to pear-shaped fruit grows in clusters of 4-30. The loquat peel is smooth to slightly fuzzy and light yellow to orange in color. The juicy flesh is white to light yellow to orange and tastes sweet to sub acid. The flavor and texture reminds me somewhat of an apricot. Watch out - there are 1-10 seeds in each of the 1-2 inch

fruits. Fruit must be tree-ripened for the best flavor. A mature tree may bear from 35-300 pounds of fruit per tree per year. While loquats are considered somewhat short-lived trees living only 20-30 years, I would recommend them for

every landscape. Loquats look tropical, are hardy and somewhat drought tolerant, and provide a tasty crop of fruit on a yearly basis. Late February and March starts the season for this fruit when few other fruits are readily available. Try this tree and its tasty fruit this year!

For more information on all types of fruit trees and other gardening issues, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our **Plant Clinics** are available across the county:

- **Demonstration Garden (6900 Florida Streeet, PG)** Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** 3rd Wednesday of month 9:00am-12:00pm.

Monthly **Plant Clinics** are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Peachland Promenades Publix** 2nd Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** 3rd Saturday of month.
- **Lowes Garden Center Murdock** 4th Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by email (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

Resource:

Gilman, E.F. & Watson, D.G. (2007) Eriobaotrya japonica: Loquat, UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Gilman, E.F. & Watson, D.G. (2006) Eriobotrya deflexa: Bronze Loquat, UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Gilman, E.F. & Watson, D.G. (2007) Eriobotrya japonica 'Coppertone': 'Coppertone' Loquat, UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Gilman, E.F. & Watson, D.G. (2007), Eriobotrya japonica 'Variegata': 'Variegata' Loquat UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Crane, J.H. and Caldeira, M.L. (2006), Loquat Growing in the Florida Home Landscape, UF/IFAS Extension Service.