



PHOTO: LACY KERR ROBINSON

# A Splash of CITRUS

*The cold-hardy satsuma makes an eye-pleasing—and tasty—addition to your yard or orchard.*

**N**ow that the chill is on, what better way to liven up your landscape than with a citrus tree? The cold-hardy—and delicious—satsuma can weather most winters.

The satsuma is a member of the mandarin orange family. It is characterized by its easy-to-peel skin, very few seeds and sweet, succulent wedges of fruit. The fruit keeps for a while and is good for juicing, eating and cooking.

In addition to its sweetness, the trees make a nice addition to any orchard or yard. They provide a lush, green element year-round, complete with fragrant blooms in spring and bright orange fruit in winter.

March and April are optimal pollination times. “The fragrant satsuma petals are very attractive to bees,” says Dr. Bobby Fletcher, horticulture agent for Louisiana State University AgCenter.

“These citrus trees are low to medium maintenance,” Fletcher explains. “Not only do satsumas have an ornamental use, I call them ‘edible landscape.’” Satsuma trees can be used simply as accents, for fruit or for privacy.

► **TEMPERATURE.** Citrus thrives best in temperate to tropical zones. But while oranges and limes tend to grow in tropical climates, satsumas—as well as kumquats—can withstand cooler temperatures than most.

“We consider 26 to 27 degrees critical temperatures,” says Fletcher. “If it stays below 26 degrees from 12- to 24-hour periods, the tree incurs damage.” While the satsuma tree should not stay in prolonged cold, mature trees can actually withstand temperatures down to about 18 degrees for short periods of time.

In case temperatures do reach that critical zone, Fletcher advises growers to leave bare ground under the

tree, rather than mulch. “Basically, it allows heat to radiate out of the soil,” Fletcher explains. “This provides a microclimate—Mother Nature’s extra few degrees of protection.”

► **PLANTING.** Late February and March are the ideal times to plant, after the threat of severe December freezes have passed in more temperate climates.

Select a well-drained area with soil high in organic matter, Fletcher advises. Make sure the tree gets a lot of sun—away from buildings. And, as growers in hurricane-ravaged areas can attest, excessive rainfall and heavy winds can damage fruit and cause premature drop.

If soil in your area is dense with clay, make sure to plant on a mound or row, 8 to 12 inches high.

Many nurseries offer grafted rootstocks that have the added benefit of being especially vigorous and cold-hardy. These plant nurseries generally carry dwarf varieties as well, which are ideal for container planting.

► **FERTILIZATION SYSTEM.** The initial fertilization should occur in mid-March, six weeks after transplanting. In subsequent years, fertilization should begin in late January or February. However, avoid fertilizing after the end of June. Late fertilization will decrease cold-hardiness of the satsuma.

► **PROBLEMS.** White flies and scab seem to plague satsuma trees the most, says Fletcher. “White flies secrete a honey dew that can turn into sooty mold,” he adds. A good recommended fungicide, however, should knock out most disease problems, and home gardeners can use a light horticultural oil to minimize most insect populations. —*Claire Vath*

## for more info

For more information on the planting and fertilization of satsuma trees, or to find out if they can be planted in your area, contact your local Extension agent, or visit the LSU AgCenter at [www.lsuagcenter.com](http://www.lsuagcenter.com).