



Urban Harvest

A New Apple for Southeast Texas

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Carnavale, the first new apple for the Houston area in at least quarter of a century. This Brazilian variety produces sweet, large apples, in huge number.

Gardeners in our area have opportunities to grow hundreds of varieties of vegetables, fruits, herbs, trees, shrubs and other native and non-native plants. In many ways, we have a bewildering collection of possibilities that taxes all of us in deciding what to plant, as well as where, and how, and when.

Adding to the complexity of all this is the truly astonishing number of cultivars of different vegetables and

fruits. There are literally hundreds of melon, sweet corn and bean varieties for example and well over 2000 tomato varieties one could try. Whether one looks at varieties of sunflower or antique rose or basil or fig or orange or even banana, the story is the same: there are far more kinds than you could ever grow.

But that's not true with apples-- at least in Southeast Texas. The 2011 [Seed Savers Exchange Yearbook](#) lists about 340 varieties of apple that are available at least as grafting wood through their member exchange. And many of these are truly wonderful. Some are amazingly sweet dessert apples, while others like the poorly storing, tart-sweet Yellow Transparent apples of Washington State that I dearly love, and others are mainly for making cider or applejack.

But all but two of them — Anna and Golden Dorsett have one thing in common — they hate our puny semi-tropical winters, and say the apple equivalent of “you ARE kidding”, and refuse to bear good fruit. All but two are worthless here.

There are a few other very low chill apples — that if planted on a Texas rootstock will grow here. Places like www.baylaurenursery.com sell a number of these very low chill apples like Beverly Hills, Pettingill, Sundowner, and Winter Banana, but they are not very good or get cooked in our summers. Until now, only Anna and Golden Dorsett, because they need little if any chill, and ripen in June, have been our best apples.



The new Brazilian apples ripen in the May Houston sun.

All that is about to change with this year's Urban Harvest fruit tree sale on January 19, 2013. The Houston wholesale nursery Treesearch Farms (www.treesearchfarms.net) is offering through Urban Harvest the first new apple for the Houston area in at least quarter of a century. This Brazilian variety produces sweet, large apples, in huge numbers, and does this consistently each year, despite the hot then cold inconsistency of our winters.

This fireblight resistant variety was imported about 25 years ago from a Brazilian research station by the now legendary Texas Agricultural Extension horticulturist Loy Shreve. Dr. Shreve then distributed it for testing around Texas. It didn't thrive in Uvalde where Dr. Shreve researched it, but it did thrive closer to the Gulf in our different soil on different rootstocks, and thanks to local fruit enthusiasts, it has been preserved, and now it will be available to area apple lovers.

The North American commercial debut of this Brazilian apple promises to provide one of the most exciting plant additions to our gardener's design palette in many years, and in a few years more will no doubt improve our fruit lovers palates too!

This column is sponsored by Urban Harvest. To find out more about community gardens, school gardens, farmers markets and gardening classes, visit www.urbanharvest.org.