



Urban Harvest

## Swap Out Ornamental Shrubs for Edibles

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Winter's hard freezes did minor damage to garden life, but none the less area gardeners usually take advantage of spring's arrival to consider changes to their gardens. Now is the chance to slip in edibles that produce more than fuel for the compost pile.

Fruit trees are a no brainer. There are dozens to choose from whether your taste is for traditional temperate fruit or exotic tropicals. Shrub and vine options are fewer but worth consideration. Check the [Urban Harvest](http://UrbanHarvest.org) website, UrbanHarvest.org, for detailed growing information about conventional fruiting plants.

### **Conventional fruiting shrubs**

Blackberries (*Rubus fruticosus*) can be grown as medium to large deciduous shrubs but pruning to 4 feet forces the plant to flush out and produce more fruit. Sweet small white blooms cover the plant in the spring followed by a summer full of delicious juicy berries. Its coarse foliage turns a mix of red, orange and purple of rich fall display.



Blackberries are a juicy summer treat and the foliage provides a sure fire fall color display.



Blueberries prefer an acidic soil as do a long time Houston area garden staple the azalea.

Blueberries (*Vaccinium* spp.) are one of the easiest fruits to grow in our area and have fewer pests. The key to success is making sure they are grown in acidic soil, similar to azaleas. They are large shrubs that prefer full sun but will tolerate less light than most other fruits. Two classes of blueberries, Southern Highbush and Rabbiteye grow well here. Most

varieties in each class need to be pollinated by another variety in its class, but having more than one variety can extend their ripening season, which is generally May into early summer.



Though citrus typically are grown as trees, smaller growing citrus like kumquats and Mandarins can easily be trained as shrubs.

They must have good drainage and air circulation. Their fall ripening fruit are a bit more work than other fruits as they need to be brined before eaten.

Citrus, sure they're trees but many of the ornamental shrubs we use grow to the same height, 8 to 15 feet. They can be easily pruned to fit any garden. The citrus harvest season runs from late summer through early winter so it's possible to plant a citrus hedge with different types of citrus you can harvest for months.

Olives (*Olea europaea* L.), again, are trees that can be trained to grow as shrubs. Their fine-textured grey foliage make them a perfect back drop hedge.

Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) are easy to grow in the Houston area with no disease and no pests. They are large deciduous shrubs with small glossy green leaves that create a fine texture. A bright orange ornamental flower appears in spring with fruit ripening in late summer.

### ***Not-so-conventional fruiting plants***

Natal plum (*Carrisa grandiflora*) is a small evergreen shrub with a high-salt tolerance that makes it a must have for coastal communities. The just-bigger-than-pea size fruit has the texture of a strawberry and a taste some describe as a sweet cranberry.

Pineapple guava (*Feijoa sellowiana*) can be used as a small tree but is frequently grown as a hedge. Its evergreen foliage is a grey-blue/green with a silvery underside. The bark is shaggy with a cinnamon color. The exotic flowers appear in spring with prominent fuschia stamens and fleshy



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white petals that taste sweet. The egg-size fruit ripens in May with a taste that is likened to a pineapple.

Roses (*Rosa* spp.), long-time garden standard, also produce fruit, at least many of them do. Antique roses are best for producing the fruit known as hips. They can be as small as a fat pumpkin seed or as large as a small plum. Though they can be eaten raw, they are typically made into marmalades, jams, jellies, syrup, beverages and wines. Pound for pound they contain more vitamin C than oranges.



Even if you're not a jam or jelly fan, rose hips make a beautiful ornamental display in the garden

*This column is produced by Urban Harvest. Learn about gardening classes, community gardens and orchards, farmers' markets and more at [www.urbanharvest.org](http://www.urbanharvest.org).*