

Mayhaws for North Florida

Mayhaw may be a fruit to consider for North Florida. If you are a fruit enthusiast and you've tried the more common fruit trees in your home orchard, you may consider growing a less common fruit tree native to our area.

Pete Andersen, Professor of Horticultural Sciences at the University of Florida/ Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences North Florida Research and Education Center, shares information on this underused fruit tree in today's article.

Mayhaws (*Crataegus aestivalis*, *C. rufula*, *C. opaca*) are native to the southeastern United States. Mayhaws are in the rose family and the hawthorn genus. They are medium-sized trees that produce white blooms in the spring. Mayhaws produce a small apple-like fruit that is highly prized for its jelly. Fruit size is usually less than 1 inch in diameter. The trees are also valued as an ornamental species. They usually bloom in late February and sometimes sustain crop loss due to late winter freezes. The fruit usually ripens in early May. Mayhaw trees are cold hardy and, if properly conditioned, they can survive temperatures as low as -25 °F. Mayhaws are often found along river bottoms and along streams and in swamps from North Florida to North Carolina. Although they are often found in low areas subject to perennial flooding, mayhaws perform best in well-drained soils. Historically, mayhaws have been collected from native stands; however, there are many named cultivars.

There is considerable demand for cultivated mayhaw trees since much of their native range has been developed, or their native land is private, or has limited access. Krewer and Crocker (1997) reported on the performance of 35 mayhaw cultivars in Attapulgus GA, Tifton, GA and Florida. They recommended the following cultivars in the order of ripening: T. O. Superberry, Mason's Superberry, Superspur, Saline, Big Red, Crimson, Big V, Turnage #57 and Turnage #88. Mayhaw trees can be 30 feet tall and 30 feet wide after 20 years of growth so plant them in areas that will accommodate a medium-sized tree.

Common insect pests of mayhaw include aphids, apple maggot, flat headed apple borers and white flies. Plum curculio is the most debilitating pest, and if not controlled may eliminate the entire crop.

For additional information on mayhaws, contact your local UF/IFAS Extension Office or visit <http://pubs.caes.uga.edu/caespubs/pubcd/C966/C966.html>.

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