**SEEN GROWING ON THE EASTERN SHORE**

**Segment for Week of Jan 25, 2021**

This is Steve Ruleson bringing you information on shore friendly living and gardening from the Eastern Shore of Virginia Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Traveling the Eastern Shore, one sees a lot of ordinary stuff: corn, cotton, soybeans, wheat, green beans (enough to feed the whole nation), tomatoes, and the stuff of “home gardens”. One may also see some different things such as pomegranates, figs, persimmons, Meyer lemons, and pawpaws.

Pomegranates are originally from Iran, Turkey, and India. They can be found in yards and hedgerows, particularly around abandoned homes. Thomas Jefferson planted them at Monticello. Evidence of cultivation goes back to 1400 BC in the Middle East. Native Americans did not grow pomegranates, as they arrived in the US after the establishment of the Jamestown Colony.

Figs, originally from the Mediterranean and Asia, can be found throughout our region. The most prized fig on the shore is the Hog Island fig which evolved from figs brought to the Barrier Islands in the 1660s. The first colony was abandoned with the first permanent settlement on Hog Island, around the time of the American Revolution. The Hog Island fig has been perpetuated by the Barrier Islands Center museum and can be bought at various venues on the Shore.

Persimmons are native to the Eastern Shore and can be found in many woodlots here. The fruit is small, about the size of a walnut. They are very tasty after the first frost but, before are very astringent! They make great jams and jellies but need to be VERY ripe. Asian persimmons can also be found here but are much larger, bright orange, and can be eaten just like an apple.

While visiting a friend in Cape Charles, I noticed a tree with yellow fruit. She told me it was a Meyer lemon - a cross between a regular lemon and a mandarin orange. It is a small tree or large bush; its fruit is yellow and round; and the juice is sweeter than regular lemon juice. The tree was introduced to the US from China in 1908. It is just starting to be introduced in culinary literature for use in recipes.

Pawpaw is really an unknown and underused native plant. It grows in tree colonies as an understory tree. It has a banana custard flavor and was grown by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson who both considered it one of their favorite desserts. The downsides to the fruit are that it doesn’t store and ship well, and there are a lot of seeds.

Travel around the Shore yourself and look for native and introduced fruits that you wouldn’t normally think about. Maybe even try some, and you might be pleasantly surprised.

From my perch near the mouth of Occohannock Creek, I recorded xxx of rain last week.

For answers to Gardening questions call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. For a written version of this segment, go to the ESVMG website.