Introducing Pomegranates to the Dooryard

KAREN M. STAUDERMAN*1 AND WILLIAM CASTLE2

1University of Florida, IFAS, Volusia County Extension, DeLand, FL 32724
2University of Florida, IFAS, Citrus Research and Education Center, Lake Alfred, FL 33850

Recent record-breaking freezes and citrus disease outbreaks have resulted in loss of dooryard fruit trees, including citrus trees in Volusia County landscapes. This tree loss has resulted in an increased interest in alternative Florida-friendly plants to meet the demand of edible fruit trees in dooryard landscapes. The University of Florida research and extension team responded by providing educational opportunities to Volusia County homeowners, master gardeners, and residents on the establishment of pomegranates as an ornamental and/or edible fruit tree in the dooryard. Individuals were offered educational opportunities through news articles, newsletters, seminars, a public broadcasted television program, radio interviews, and a fact sheet on basic establishment of pomegranates. In addition, the educational programs highlighted the aesthetic flower appeal, health benefits of the fruit, and the diversity in growth habit of pomegranates.

A total of 400 trees and a total of 30 different pomegranate varieties were made available for sale, exclusively to Volusia County residents, through a cooperative arrangement between the authors. The plants were produced at the UF-IFAS Citrus Research and Education Center in Lake Alfred, FL as part of an ongoing project by W. Castle, professor emeritus, to evaluate pomegranate potential in Florida. The planting locations in either the dooryard or a commercial site of the 400 pomegranate trees sold from the program were recorded on a Volusia County map (Fig.1). Advertising the Volusia County pomegranates program occurred quickly by both word of mouth and the media, resulting in all of the 400 trees sold, with future orders exceeding 125 trees.

The proceeds of the tree sale provided funds to purchase horticultural supplies for the county 4-H horticultural youth program. The sudden popularity of pomegranates from this program sparked the need for further production by two nurseries in the central Florida area to meet the demand. Evaluation data through an email survey showed that 85 participants had increased knowledge relating to the establishment of pomegranate trees in Volusia County. After 3 months a total of 400 trees planted reflect the growing popularity of pomegranates in Volusia County dooryards.

Fig. 1. Pomegranates distributed to homeowners were mapped by the collaborators.