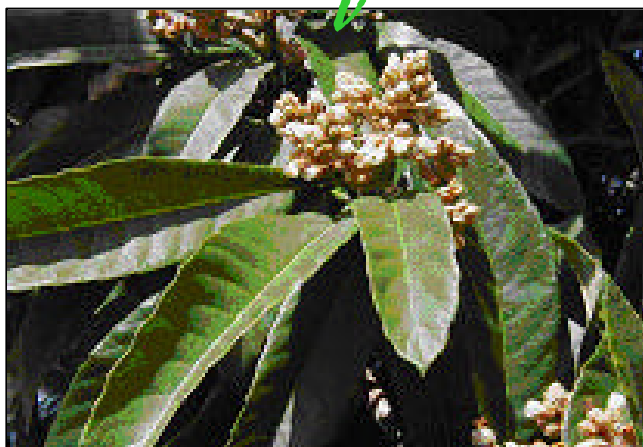


City of Plantation Landscape Architecture presents ...

## Plant of the Quarter



### Loquat / *Eriobotrya japonica*

As the days get shorter I am again refreshed by the cooler day and evening temperatures. The plants take a break from their ravenous growth and I enjoy tidying the garden and just being a part of it.

We have looked at flowering trees and trees with other charming characteristics like their bark or habit. This season I would like to turn your attention to one of our many fruit trees. Our subtropical climatic is ideal for growing fruit trees and many are the right size and scale for our smaller yards. I would like to be more encouraging with our citrus trees (oranges, grapefruits

and limes) but citrus canker prohibits our installing new trees at this time. We will keep our fingers crossed that within a few years we can welcome them back. In the meantime, we can explore other families of fruit trees.

This quarter we have selected the Loquat, botanically known as *Eriobotrya japonica*. It is native to China and Japan and is part of the Rosaceae family due to the five petals in its flower. The Loquat has notable characteristics that add interest, color and texture to the garden. Edibility and its small scale are an added bonus. We have given seedlings of this tree to the students of Plantation elementary and middle schools. I have watched a typical 10-inch seedling grow to a height of 5 feet in one year.

#### A brief summary of this species:

**Habit/Height/Spread** Loquat is a small tree, growing to 20 feet with a nearly equal to or wider spread. It has stiff, upright turned branches. Its coarseness sets it apart as a small ornamental specimen tree while making it an ideal patio or shade tree. Its low branching habit also puts it into the category of a screening plant. And it is not just another pretty ornamental tree! This one gives us colorful fruit!

**Foliage/Flowers/Fruit** The evergreen foliage gives the Loquat a distinctive look that sets it apart, even from a distance. Its large, leathery, stiff, toothed and quilted leaves grow to 10-inches and are a dark grayish green above and a dull fuzzy texture below. Fragrant clusters of small five-petaled white flowers are held conspicuously above the leaves on branch tips in the fall and winter months followed by clusters of orange or yellow plum-shaped fruit. According to the author of *The Tropical Gardener*, "The fruit has a fine full flavor, rather tart, and can be eaten fresh or made into an excellent jelly." Just wait, it will be late winter when the Loquat will show its maximum fruit color.

**Recommendations** Loquat is really care-free. It is not fussy about soil conditions, is drought tolerant once it is established and is tolerant of moderate salt air. It does not require a lot of fertilization but will greatly benefit from a good slow release fertilizer with minors applied twice a year: mid-March and July. It will tolerate partial afternoon shade but sets flowers and blooms best in full sun.

**Problems** I have not personally experienced problems with this plant. Reference material indicate that scales, caterpillars, root rot and fireblight can be a problem. Try to keep irrigation water off the foliage and try to irrigate close to sunrise to discourage pathogens. I have seen the weevils nibble at the Loquat but not disfigure or decimate it.



**Purchasing and Planting** The Loquat should not be too hard to find. Nurserymen are encouraged to grow species that people want to buy. If a nursery does not sell the tree ask them to refer you to another nursery. If you would like to have more information on fruit trees contact the Rare Fruit and Vegetable Club through the Cooperative Extension Office in Davie or attend one of their monthly meetings.

When shopping for any tree, remember not be tempted by a tree that does not demonstrate good branch structure or that has girdled roots (roots that encircle the roots and run around the edge of the container). Keep looking. Look for a single, straight trunk with evenly spaced branches around the whole tree. Always plant to expose the root flare and create a raised ring (several feet from the trunk to retain the extra water you will be giving until it is established). Apply only 2-3 inches of mulch to retain the extra water and to discourage weed growth and that nasty string trimmer that loves to bite into its tender bark. (Don't let the mulch touch the sacred bark either. Let it breath and discourage ants from nesting there.)

**GOOD LUCK AND HAPPY BOTANIZING!**