

the pits

NEWSLETTER

Jan./Feb. 1998
Volumn 20 # 5

WHAT'S IN THE MARKET

Arrowroot, Black Sapote, Canistel, Cherimoya, Carob, Date, Feijoa, Fig, Kumquat, Lemon grass, Longan, Malanga, Mamay sapote, Mango, Name, Papaya, Passion fruit, Pomegranate, Persimmon, Prickly pear, Tamarillo, Tomatillo, Taro, and Water Chestnut.

SEEDS

This month, Bob Jurgens is offering Tamarind and mystery seeds*. If you are interested send, \$1.00 per packet and an SASE to: Bob Jurgens, 116-32 227th St., Cambria Heights, NY 11411. Checks should be made payable to the Rare Pit and Plant Council. These seeds are large, so be sure to send a **sturdy** envelope.

*The mystery seeds are members of the Solanum (tomato family) and have been sent to us by our Australian member, Andrew Adair. We do not have a Latin name, Andrew calls them "Fur-balls" others call them Lolu. The leaves are velvety, the fruits round and tasty, and the leaves have thorns on the mid-rib. Bob says they may take sometime to germinate.

GOTTCHA!

We stand corrected. We accused the Goddess Demeter of being the father of Persephone (an unlikely feat even in Greek mythology). Persephone was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, the goddess of fertility. When Persephone was still young and beautiful, she was kidnaped by Pluto, the God of the Underworld. Pluto persuaded Persephone to eat a pomegranate, the death apple and this act would doom her to life in the



HAPPY 4696

Underworld. Demeter finally retrieved her daughter, but had to return each year to the Underworld for four months. When she left, the grains withered and the flowers died, but when she returned the earth was renewed

The Rare Pit & Plant Council

17 Circuit Ave. Scituate, MA 02066



GINGER

Zingiber officinale

Ginger is a herbaceous perennial that is a member of the Zingiberaceae family. There are at least 1,000 species, many of whom are cultivated for their fragrant ornamental flowers. The ginger of commerce is *Zingiber officinale*. Ginger is derived from the rhizome (creeping root similar to iris). The plant produces 2-4' stalks that have scattered 4", lanceolate, grass-like leaves. It seldom flowers.

The exact origins of ginger have been lost in the mists of time. There are Greek cake recipes that date back 4,400 years. It is not native to Greece, but probably came via the ancient "Silk Road". It probably originated in tropical Asia, Malaysia, or India.

Today ginger is cultivated throughout most of the tropical world. Variants in taste depend the country of origin. "The ginger from Indo-china is particularly hot, ginger from West Africa is harsh and peppery, and ginger from Jamaica is pale in color and delicate."¹ Most of the ginger sold in supermarkets and China towns is from Jamaica.

To grow:

Ginger is one of the simplest pits to grow. Purchase a plump rhizome (called a hand) that has several swollen white, pink tipped nubs. Choose a pot that is large enough to accommodate the rhizome horizontally. Fill the pot with moist, sterile soil, lay the rhizome on top, sprinkle a thin layer of soil over the rhizome - some of it should be above the soil. Put a light plastic cover over the pot to insure humidity, and if possible give it some bottom heat. Green

shoots should appear in about 10 days. In the summer, put your plant in the garden. The rhizome will double or triple in size. Harvest before frost and you will have grown enough ginger to last for months. If the plant blooms, it will die back, but will start to regrow in a month or so.

My Ginger Bloomed In late July I noticed two strange looking shoots emerging from my ginger rhizome.

They were fatter and nubbier than new shoots - dare I hope the ginger was going to bloom. I watched and waited, checking each day as they grew and swelled. Ornamental gingers are famous for their showy, fragrant, long lasting flowers. I don't know when I have looked forward to a bloom as much as I did these. One began to dry up and fade away. Despair! The other, however, continued to grow and sent out a leaf from the top of the "culm". Finally in late September two very anemic dull gray white flowers emerged. No fragrance, no pizzaz! and they only lasted a few days! When people say ginger seldom blooms, they may have just missed it while they were grocery shopping or talking on the phone.

The bloom may not be much to look at, but ginger makes a very attractive foliage plant. It is so easy to grow that it makes an excellent project to do with children. TRY IT!

1.Food, Root, Waverly, Simon Schuster
1980



“HOT” TIP

The following tip is from our culinary consultant, Tizzy Lizzy. “To keep ginger fresh, put the rhizome (hand) in an airtight glass jar that has a rubber gasket and metal seal. Fill the jar with sherry, seal it and store in the refrigerator. It will keep for years. When you need fresh ginger, take out the hand, slice off what you need and return

it to the sherry.”

Ginger trivia:

Waverly Root notes that horse traders would sometimes give a ginger suppository to the horses. It makes them lift their tails, purportedly an indication of vigor.

BOOK REVIEW

The New Oxford Book of Food Plants.

Vaughan, J.G. & Geissler, C.A.

Oxford University Press. 1997

239 pages. About \$ 50.00.

Illustrations by: B.E.Nicholson, Elisabeth Dowle & Elizabeth Rice

There hasn't been a relevant pit book published in a long time and we were especially eager to obtain a copy of this update of a standard published 28 years ago. Virtually every edible plant or fruit consumed around the globe is discussed and illustrated with elegant colored paintings of the plant, including detail drawings of the flower, fruit, leaf and root. Starting out with an illustrated glossary the book is loosely organized around culinary class. For example grain crops, sugar crops, vegetable fruits and bulb vegetables. Although common names are used botanical names are always included. The history of each plant is noted, many traced back thousands of years. Each plant is described along with its nutritional content in one or two paragraphs. Vitamin content, especially vitamin C is prominently mentioned.

This is clearly a British volume with 5 pages devoted to apples,

virtually none of which would be found on this side of the

Atlantic. We

also noted the omission of several tropical fruits, such as Key Lime, Jaboticaba and Miracle Fruit.

At the end of the book there is an extensive list of nutritional, mineral and vitamin content of each of the foods as well as a helpful chart noting the percent degradation of vitamins by various forms of cooking. Did you know that boiling vegetables destroys 45 % of the vitamin C but none of vitamin E ? At the end there is a helpful reference list for those who want more information.

Have we any reservations ? A few. This is an excellent book, beautiful to look at and great fun to read but the text is short and a few paragraphs for each food only whets one's appetite. Growing instructions are not provided although one can guess the conditions required from your knowledge of geography and climate.

John Hart



What fruit was named to honor Capt Bligh ?

Food Safety's Waiting Weapon

FOLLOW UP

In our last issue we reported on an that appeared in the New York Times regarding The Food and Drug Administration's approval of irradiation of imported tropical fruits and vegetables. Here is an availability list of those fruits that are grown here in the USA. These are unlikely to be radiated and therefore to have viable seeds.

We would like to thank the Cooperative Extension Services of the University of Florida and the University of California. Both graciously faxed the information to me.

Not all tropical imports are irradiated, and we should still keep on trying to grow them.

Florida Cooperative Extension Service & Fruit & Spice Park

Annatto <i>Bixa orellana</i>	Fall
Antemoya <i>Annona cherimola</i>	June- July
Avocado <i>Persea americana</i>	June - Mar.
Black sapote <i>Diospyros digyna (ebenaster)</i>	Dec. - Mar
Breadfruit <i>Artocarpus communis</i>	Year round
Calamondin <i>Citrus madurensis</i>	Nov.-Apr.
Canistel/Eggfruit <i>Pouteria campechiana</i>	All year off and on
Carambola / Star fruit <i>Averrhoa carambola</i>	Aug.-Oct., Dec. - Jan.
Cashew <i>Anacardium occidentale</i>	May - July
Cherimoya <i>Annona cherimola</i>	June - Sept.

Chinese red date <i>Sizyphus jujuba</i>	Fall
Citron <i>Citrus medica</i>	Nov. - Feb.
Coffee <i>Coffea arabica</i>	Aug.-Oct.
Custard apple <i>Annona reticulata</i>	Feb.- Apr.
Date <i>Phoenix dactylifera</i>	Fall
Feijoa <i>Feijoa sellowiana</i>	Oct. - Dec.
Fig <i>Ficus carica</i> 'Smyrna'	September
Grapefruit <i>Citrus paradisi</i>	Nov. - June
Guava <i>Psidium guajava</i>	Aug. - Oct. Feb. - Mar.
Jackfruit <i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i>	Year round
Jaboticaba <i>Myrciaria cauliflora</i>	Year round
Key lime <i>Citrus aurantifolia</i>	June - Sept. (some all year)

Kiwi <i>Actinidia chinensis</i>	Nov.-Dec
Kumquat <i>Fortunella crassifolia</i>	Oct. - Jan.
Lemon <i>Citrus limon</i>	Oct. - Jan.
Lime berry <i>Triphasia trifoliata</i>	June - Oct.
Longan <i>Euphoria longana</i>	July - Aug.
Loquat <i>Eriobotrya japonica</i>	Feb. - June
Lychee <i>Litchi chinensis</i>	June - July
Macadamia <i>Macadamia integrifolia</i> & <i>M. tetraphylla</i>	Aug. - Oct.
Mamey sapote <i>Calocerypus sapote</i>	May - July (some all year).
Mango <i>Mangifera indica</i>	Aug. - Nov.
May apple <i>Syzygium malaccensis</i>	Summer
Maypop / Hardy passion vine <i>Passiflora incarnata</i>	Fall
Pomegranate <i>Punica granatum</i>	Winter
Monstera <i>Monstera deliciosa</i>	Sept. - Oct.
Olive <i>Olea europaea</i>	Sept - Dec.

Papaya <i>Carica papaya</i>	Year round
Passion fruit <i>Passiflora edulis</i>	June - Sept
Persimmon <i>Diospyros kaki</i> & Hardy persimmon <i>D. virginiana</i>	Fall
Pitaya/ Night Blooming cereus <i>Hylocereus undatus</i>	Apr. - July
Pummelo <i>Citrus grandis</i>	Nov. - Feb.
Spanish lime <i>Melicoccus bijugatus</i>	July - Oct.
Sapodilla <i>Manilkara zapota</i>	Feb.- Nov
Star apple <i>Chrysophyllum cainito</i>	Mar.- May
Strawberry guava <i>Psidium littoral</i>	June - Oct.
Tamarind <i>Tamarindus indica</i>	Apr. - June
Tangelo <i>Citrus reticulata</i> x <i>C. grandis</i>	Oct. - Mar.
Tree tomato <i>Cyphomandra bectacea</i>	Nov.- Mar



Monstera deliciosa

NOTES IN PASSING

Chris Carrdus sent us the following tip. If you are not using your yogurt maker, use it to germinate seeds and root cuttings. Fill the cups with soil and sow your seeds. The machine keeps the soil at an even 80°, the ideal temperature for germinating

tropicals.

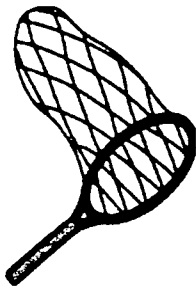
A cheerful reminder. December 21 was the first day of winter for us, but it was the first day of spring for houseplants. By mid January the days are markedly longer and most plants break their dormancy - time to resume light fertilizing.

WINTER BLUES

It is a known fact that emotional depression is commoner in the short dark days of midwinter than other seasons of the year. It is also known that many or even most cases of depression are associated with demonstrable abnormalities of brain chemistry. Serotonin which is a member of a class of neurotransmitters called monoamines is found to be reduced in the brains of depressed individuals. The drug Prozac which is useful in treating depression blocks the uptake of Serotonin into blood platelets and nerve terminals. But Prozac is expensive and requires a doctor's prescription.

We have received a number of queries regarding treatment of depression with St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*). Because this is regarded as a dietary supplement and not a medication it is not under the control of the Food and Drug Administration and is available at health food stores. The presumed active component of St. John's Wort is a compound called Hypericin. Some studies, although of variable quality, have suggested the St. John's Wort have suggested that it is superior to placebo in treatment of depression.

It is touted as a "natural" treatment



SURFING THE NET

In the course of researching the availability of American grown tropical fruits, I took to the Net and came across some wonderful locations. The California Rare Fruit Growers have a delicious Web Site. They have a list of 250 rare and unusual fruits - all with descriptions. There is a general cross reference list, book reviews, sales, etc. I reached them through:

[Http://www.altavista.digital.com/](http://www.altavista.digital.com/)
Their address is:

[Http://www.crfg.org/](http://www.crfg.org/)
And for sheer beauty, as well as

and therefore is attractive to many. We have discussed the danger of "natural" treatments when we warned about the dangers of Ephedra which was a natural substance that killed several people. Natural doesn't mean safe or effective. Dietary supplements like St. John's Wort are not subjected to the intense scrutiny that pharmaceuticals are. They are almost never tested for safety and efficacy with the rigor of a drug that is going to be licensed in the USA.

Are you interested? If so you should get diagnosed by a psychologist or psychiatrist, not by yourself. If you are found to be depressed and want to have treatment you should discuss the options with the psychiatrist. (A psychologist cannot prescribe medication). If you and your physician want to try this approach realize that benefit will not be seen sooner than two weeks and possibly for a month.

John Hart M.D.



information, check out the stunning home page of the Rare Fruit Council International. The page was designed by Bob Cannon their editor and it is stunning.

Their address is: [Http://gate.net/~tfnews/](http://gate.net/~tfnews/)

I read a very interesting article about Lingaro, *Elaeagnus philippensis*. It is a fragrant, fruiting vine that might be a wonderful addition to our indoor Pit Gardens.

If you try these addresses and they don't work - go to Altavista and search for Rare Fruit Growers of California and Rare Fruit Council International "Miami". They are well worth a visit.

CAROB/ ST. JOHN'S BREAD

Ceratonia siliqua

We have been preparing for a Pit talk. One of our problems is; what to bring? It should be something that will fit in the car, something that is readily available and easy to grow, and most important - looks good. Our small 8" carob tree fits the bill.

Carob is sold in 6-8" long, flat, dark brown pods. They are available year round in up-scale supermarkets, health food stores and Middle Eastern markets. Within the pods, there are 5-8, flat 1/4" round seeds. These seeds are so uniform in size that they have been used by goldsmiths to check the weight of gold — 14 carat gold.

Extracting the seed is a bit of a chore. The pods are quite dry, but not brittle. You must break them open in several places to extract the seeds. Once you have several seeds, gently nick them by rubbing one edge against a piece of fine sandpaper or a nail file. This should produce a spot on the seeds edge that is lighter in color.

The seeds need to be soak to re-hydrate them. Place the seeds in a glass of luke warm water. They will swell slightly in 24 hours and be ready for planting. If any seeds float to the top, discard them — they are not viable. (This is a good way to check the vitality of all seeds.)

These seeds can be sown in small flats filled with slightly moistened soil or in jiffy pellets. (Seeds should be planted to a

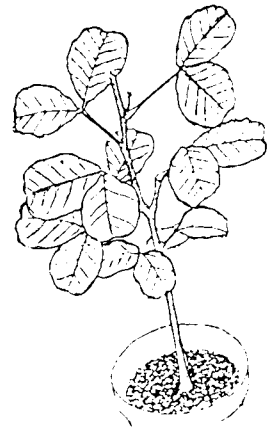


depth that is 2 ½ times their size.) Loosely cover the container with plastic to insure humidity. They should germinate in 14 - 30 days.

When the seedlings have their second set of true leaves they are ready to pot on. Carob is very slow growing and can live in a 3" pot for several years.

Carob is a small 15' tree that is native to the Mediterranean. The pinnate leaves are about 4" long and the leaflets are 1" long, and resemble miniature holly leaves. Carob is self pollinating and in time will flower and fruit in the home. The flowers are borne in racemes in the early fall and followed by the fruits that are an iridescent green, maturing to dusky brown. Whether your carob blooms or not, it is always an attractive houseplant that is free of bugs, drought resistant and very easy to grow.

Carob trivia: It is said to be the locust that St. John ate during his stay in the Wilderness. The honey in "The land of milk and honey" probably refers to Carob. Today carob is used as a healthy substitute for chocolate. The resemblance to chocolate is a bit remote for choc- o-holic. During the depression, the City of Los Angeles planted carob trees along the streets to feed the poor.



Akee, *Blightia sapida* a poisonous native of Jamaica



RARE PIT AND PLANT COUNCIL
17 CIRCUIT AVENUE
SCITUATE, MASS 02066



Christopher Carrus
9500 Rainer Ave S. #212
Seattle
WA 98118