

the pits

NEWSLETTER

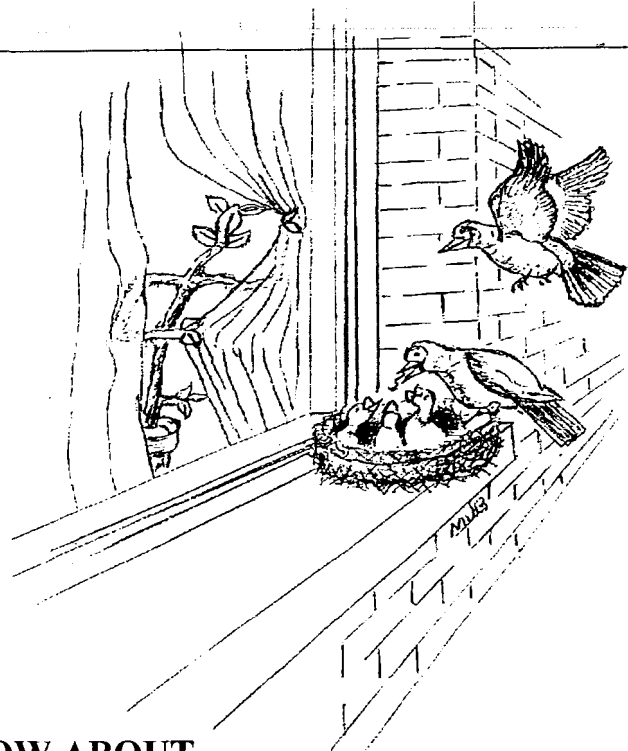
Spring 2004
Volume 22 #2

WHAT'S IN THE MARKET

Arrowroot, Carambola, Carob, Cherimoya, Chestnut, Date, Feijoa, Kumquat, Lemon grass, Malanga, Mango, Papaya, Passion fruit, Pomegranate, Persimmon, Prickly pear, Tamarillo, Tomatillo, and Water Chestnut.

SEEDS

This month Bob is offering Datura seeds. If you are interested, send \$1.00 per packet and a **sturdy, SASE** (self-addressed stamped envelope) to Bob Jurgens, 116-32 227th Street, Cambria Heights, NY , 11411. Checks should be made payable to the Rare Pit & Plant Council.



SOMETHING TO CROW ABOUT

Our two year old ginger plant that we grew from a grocery store rhizome bloomed this fall. We had three intensely fragrant 2 x 2 inch pure white flowers. What a surprise!! We have grown ginger from our earliest Pit growing days and have never really bloomed a plant. Once we had small warty buds that the plant aborted.



The plant that bloomed is 3 ½ feet tall with 6 canes. The cane that bloomed had a caliper (width) of 2 inches. The thinner canes have shown no sign of fattening up and blooming. The flowers emerge from thickened (somewhat braided looking) tip arising from the center of the foliage. Our flowers unfolded one at a time and each lasted two to three days. See growing instructions inside.

NOTES IN PASSING

The time is coming to get our plants ready for summer camp outdoors. A trick we learned last spring was to apply anti-transpirant on all our houseplants to prevent sun scorch. It saves you the trouble of hardening off the plants, starting them in shade and slowly moving them to a sunny location. Anti-transpirant is an organic product made from Pine Oil that forms a thin flexible layer on the leaves.. Apply liberally to the leaf surfaces on a day a few days before setting the plants outdoors. This application will last for 3 months. In our area the product is sold under the name of WiltProof. It's great stuff and safe!

If any of you live on the beach, this is a great product to prevent salt damage.

The Rare Pit & Plant Council

17 Circuit Ave. Scituate, MA 02066

Meyer Lemon

Citrus limon x Citrus sinensis

syn. *Citrus x meyerii*

Growing Citrus in the home

This year our Meyer Lemon produced 21 3 inch lemons and a dozen smaller ones. All have been just as tasty as the commercial Meyer that costs a fortune in the grocery store. In a couple of years it may amortize the original cost of the plant.

The Meyer Lemon is native to China where it has been grown for 400 years. It was brought to this country by a USDA agent, Frank Meyer about 100 years ago and is thought to be a natural cross between *Citrus limon* and *Citrus sinensis*. The fruits are not as tart or acid as the traditional lemons sold in grocery stores throughout the year. The flavor is similar to a tart orange with a perfumed essence. It will grow true from seed, but house grown seed may take 7-12 years to fruit. It is worth buying a plant

Common causes of Citrus and Fruit Tree Leaf Drop Among Indoor Gardens...

Joe A. Frankie

Many of us marvel at the idea that we grow productive citrus trees in our homes during the winter months, and can be quite successful at it. Growing them is relatively easy if we keep a few points in the forefront of our minds.

One of the more common problems experienced among in-door fruit growers, is leaf drop. Leaf drop is not necessarily a death for citrus trees, and does not mean you are a bad gardener, limited exclusively to out of doors growing. This is, however,

.Our tree was bought for a Pit exhibit in a New England Spring Flower Show and has been in our care for about 18 months. At that time (March) it had two large lemons and was just starting to bloom. The flowers were intensely fragrant, pure white and had a waxy texture. It continued to bloom throughout the summer months.

Italians consider the Lemon Tree to be a symbol of the Virgin Mary because it bears flowers and fruits at the same time.

Citrus plants are amongst the most rewarding plants you can grow for both fruit and flowers in the home. However, they do have some problems. This time of year they can become an infested entomologists paradise. The most common problem is Winter Leaf Drop.



reflective of a disruption of the normal growing conditions needed to keep fruit trees happy and healthy.

We have contributed 3 major factors to the defoliation of indoor tropicals, based on several years of gathering customer information and studies we have conducted. Drastic fluctuations in temperatures are the most common cause of leaf drop. How many times have we forgotten our container grown fruits out of doors during a chilly night, only to remember them the next morning? We scramble out of bed to drag them indoors to



make them warm again; thinking this will solve the problem of our neglect. Bringing a cold tree into a warm house, however, can cause leaves to drop because the plant will experience shock.

Even a 15 to 20^o difference between inside and outside temperatures can be problematic. If you forget to bring your plants in during cold nights, move them into a garage or warmer than out of doors area for several hours before bringing them indoors. Slowly introduce them to the warmth of your home. Often times, temperatures will differ as much as 40 to 50^o between an outside deck or patio and your living room.

Another potential problem is soil quality and soil moisture. Soil is the medium for which a plants nutrition, water and root strength are absorbed and gained. If it is of poor quality, your plants health will reflect this. Soils too wet or too dry will most certainly cause problems with citrus trees and defoliation is common. Always use a container with adequate drainage holes and never allow fruit trees to stand in water in a drip pan. Citrus and other fruit trees are easily susceptible to root rot, associated with soils that are too moist.

Citrus and fruit tree soil, for patio and indoor growing, should consist of 1/4 sand, 1/4 peat, 1/4 small pine bark chips, and 1/4

Zingiber officinalis

Ginger

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 at 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

Perlite. To water adequately, soak the entire container with water until it flows freely out of the bottom. To achieve this with ease, place fruit trees in a shower and allow warm, not hot, water to thoroughly soak the leaves and container for 5- 10 minutes, twice weekly. Let stand until completely drained. This washes dust and dirt from the leaves and also flushes excess fertilizers from the soil reducing the potential for salt toxicity; (a problem associated with the buildup of excess soil nutrients).

Finally, be careful not to place your citrus trees to close to a drafty door, heat register or air conditioners. Drafts created from opening and closing doors, leading to the outside, can cause the same effect as the shock experienced by fruit trees brought into a warm home, from cold temperatures outside. Both hot and cold air blowing on fruit trees may cause leaves to drop. Heat registers often generate air temperatures greater than 90^o, and air conditioners produce drafts 35^o or lower.

Joe Frankie is the Manager of Jene's Tropicals, Inc., (www.tropicalfruit.com) in St. Petersburg Florida and Curator and Educational Director, The Mana Project, Inc. (The Secret Garden), Key West, Florida

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. The stalk that bloomed will die back, but a new stalk will appear.

Some Vigorous Vines

If shade, curtains and sundry 'Window Treatments', leave you cold, but you'd still like a little privacy, consider these tubers.



**Name (Pronounced:
En Yami)**
(Dioscorea esculenta)

Names are sold in Latin and Asian markets year round. These large tubers (1-3 lbs) are a dark dusky brown and slightly hirsute (hairy) and come in odd shapes resembling parts of the human body, hands and feet. Smaller ones may be oblong or oval and be easily confused with other tubers in the market. The other tubers, Malanga and Taro have horizontal bands, Names have no bands.

It is difficult to tell what end is up and what is down. Sometimes you can see old roots at the base, but it is not necessary to know this. You can use a sphagnum bag, but it is just as easy to lay it horizontally on the top of a large pot filled with barely moist soil. There will be no need to water it, until the tuber begins to shrink and the vine is 2-4 feet tall.

The vine emerges long before the roots and you must have a wire, string, or trellis for it to twine around. A friend of ours left her Name on the terrace of her 16th floor apartment for the summer when she took off for Canada. It crawled up the wall on an outside wire and climbed through the upstairs apartment's air conditioner. The neighbors had to hack away at it all summer. When my friend returned, she chopped the vine down and found her planter full of small Name tubers.

When we lived in New York, we had a small city garden surrounded by a rickety wrought iron fence. In May I would plant Name in a large planter and by mid-June the fence would be completely obscured by the vine. Name is deciduous and in the late fall, the leaves turn yellow and drop. At this time a Columbian friend would harvest the tubers that formed over the summer. The vigor of

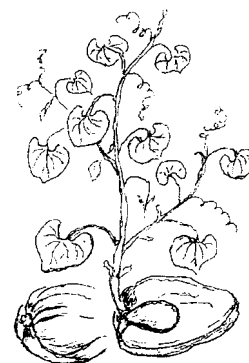
this vine cannot be underestimated.

To Eat: Peel, boil until tender and mash. Name is not as sweet as the Supermarket Yam and needs a little help. Add 1/4 cup of orange juice (or other favorite juice) to 1 1/2 cups of Name, butter and heavy cream or sour cream until it has a nice fluffy consistency.

There are three kinds of Names. They all have lovely 4 inch heart-shaped, glossy, light green leaves that are deeply veined. The differences are in the stems. The most common variety has a cylindrical stem about 1/4" in diameter, our favorite has a 'winged stem' (a thin opaque pale pink flat membrane that is slightly ruffled surrounds the stem) and the last is what my children used to call a 'Martian plant' small round growths that look like tiny space ships develop on the stem. The latter also has some thorns. We have combed the literature searching for a clear definition of each Name to no avail. If anyone finds the answer, please write to us. No matter what Name you are growing, they are lots of fun and attractive to boot.

Chayote (pronounced chi-YO-tay)
(Sechium edule)

I've trained my friends and neighbors well! Whenever they find something sprouting in the vegetable bin they bring it to me. Such was the case with a sprouting Chayote. Technically this is not a tuber, but a perennial squash, but we grow it in



the same manner as all the other tubers.

The squash is lime-green, ovate and 4-6 inches long. The skin is smooth and slightly warty. Within the flesh, there is a large flat white seed about 2 inches long, sometimes called the vegetable scallop. It is edible and considered by some the tastiest part of the squash. As the fruit begins to shrivel, a vine emerges from the wider end as seen in the illustration.

Presently the above Chayote is resting at the base of the Banana tree and the vine is growing at the rate of several inches a day. As yet no roots, but as soon as these develop it must be moved to its own pot. The vine climbs by means of tendrils and needs a sturdy wire, trellis or form for support. When planted outdoors in a natural (tropical area) the vine can attain a height of 30 feet in one season.

The seed loses its vitality when removed from the fruit. When it comes time to plant, plant the whole fruit. The flesh will supply all the starch and water necessary for vigorous growth for months. It is doubtful that you will get fruit from a pot grown plant in the north. Chayote needs a long, hot growing season to set flowers and fruit. We

have seen Chayote trained on an arbor in South Florida and it was a handsome sight, large ropy trunks twisted around the pillars and the squash hanging down from the top of the arbor.

Unlike other members of this family, the Chayote has tuberous instead of fibrous roots. These roots are also edible.

The light green leaves are typical palmate leaves of the squash family and can reach a width of 8 inches. They will be much smaller when grown in a pot.

To eat: You can prepare Chayote as you would a summer squash. It is a little mucilaginous but quite tasty. The following recipe is from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden:

Salad

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 3 Chayotes | 1 small red onion, thinly sliced |
| 2 Bell Peppers roasted, seeded, peeled and sliced. (Red and Yellow) | |
| 24 Olives | 2 Tbs Caper Berries |
| 3 Ripe Avocados, peeled and sliced. | 24 Olives |
| ½ Cup chopped fresh Cilantro | 1 Bunch of Watercress, stems removed |

Cut the Chayotes in half and simmer until soft, about 15 min. Cool and slice. Arrange Watercress, Peppers, Onion, Avocados, Chayotes, Olives and Caper Berries on individual plates. Sprinkle with chopped Cilantro and drizzle your favorite vinaigrette.

(Marty added some lime and dates. Good recipe)

Elephant's Foot Yam

(Dioscorea elephantipes)

If your into 'Designer Vines' try this one from South Africa. The "tuber" is a massive root stock (3in when young to 20 when mature) that is covered with

a deeply fissured root bark. Natives actually eat this plant in times of famine either boiled or raw. We don't advise it. Elephant's Foot can only be purchased through rare plant and cactus nurseries for a horrendous price. Ours when it was young and only 3 in across cost \$25.00 wholesale. It is a wonderful conversation piece!



The vine is deciduous, usually dies back during the summer months when you don't want shades. The leaves turn yellow and drop. At this time the plant is dormant and all water should be withheld. Once the vines begin to sprout in early November, resume light watering. Water as you would a cactus, "When it rains in Arizona".

The leaves are heart-shaped, 3-4 inches across, dark glossy, olive green and deeply veined. Ours is about 7 inches across and sends up a 20 foot vine annually. Elephant's Foot is a collectors item, but remarkably easy to grow. It will be with you for years with no effort.

Book Review

Trowel & Error.

Lovejoy, Sharon.

Workman Pub.

2003.Pp 208, \$ 13.95

This slim volume is subtitled 700 Tips and Remedies for the Gardener. I didn't count the entries but there seems to be something for even the most experienced gardener. Did you know the you can use NPK fertilizer or Urea on icy walk ways. It melts the ice and the run off isn't as damaging as melting salt ? Or that you can use unwanted cheap cologne on mealybugs, whitefly and aphids (but you better hide it when the giver visits).

The author has a sense of humor.

The book has ten chapters one of which is on indoor plants. Chapters on pests and bugs

The Banana Nursery



We have discovered the large (36 inch pot) that holds our 7 foot Banana tree is an excellent nursery for a wide variety of tubers and bulbs. Previously we have always suggested using a sphagnum bag for these large tubers. Sometimes the tubers would rot because the bag was too wet and other times they would dry out. With this system, they seem to get just enough water when I water the soil around the Banana and they don't seem to need the bottom heat.

reveal the authors basically organic philosophy. The volume ends with an excellent appendix and list of sources and organizations the reader may wish to consult for seeds, plants or other information eg. sources of beneficial insects or bats.

I loved this little book. It is easy and fun to pick up and read. Reservations ? Lovejoy suggests using a station wagon parked in a cool place as a temporary green house. We've done this but the inside windows fogged up so completely that the car was undriveable. The use of a hanging enema bag to water hanging plants though undoubtedly effective struck us as aesthetically counterproductive.

John Hart

You don't have to go out and buy either Banana or a 36" pot Just fill any large pot or container with soil. It should be large enough to accommodate any tubers or bulbs without letting them touch each other. These large tubers are full of water and will not require additional water until they sprout.

A word of warning: Move the plants along. The Name that is climbing the Banana has become too large to move and is currently forming little Names beneath the soil. I may have to commit 'herbicide' if the Banana starts to fail. The Ginger and Garlic have since been moved to pots of their own and been replaced with a Malanga. Keeping the base of this pot filled has served another purpose-the cats no longer think it's a litter box.

Gifts for Gardeners

This list was intended to be holiday gifts for gardeners, but the 'Flu' struck a week after Thanksgiving and stayed with us through Christmas. There is always a perfect time for a perfect gift for a gardening friend. The best time to order is in the late winter for early spring planting and the list below will give you hours of pleasure during the grim winter months. Enjoy.

Acorn Springs Farm
2488 Hickey Road
Hallsville TX 75650
<http://www.acornsprings.com>

Garden of Delights
14560 SW 14th St.
Davie, FL 33325-4217
1-800-741-3103
godelights@aol.com

Jene's Tropicals
6831 Central Avenue
St. Petersburg FL 33710
727-344-1668
www.tropicalfruit.com

Pacific Tree Farms
4301 Lynwood Drive
Chula Vista CA 91910
818-363-3680
www.kyburg.com/ptf

Raintree Nursery
391 Butts Road
Morton, WA 98356
360-496-6400
www.raintreenursery.com

Stokes Tropicals
PO Box 9868
New Iberia LA 70562-9868
1-800-624-9706
www.stokestropicals.com

There are several dwarf cultivars of Mango, Avocado, Chocolate Pudding trees and Cocoa trees that are suitable for container growing. Dr. John has been stewing about what to give your editor for Christmas, my list is a mile long after researching these sites.

Christmas has come and gone, and I am awaiting the delivery of a Kumquat, Dwarf Mango and Dwarf Avocado.

Magazine Subscriptions:

California Rare Fruit Growers
Fullerton Arboretum
PO Box 6850
Fullerton, CA 92834-6850
\$25.00

Tropical Fruit News
Rare Fruit Council International
PO Box 660506
Miami Springs FL 33266
\$40.00

The Pits has a Web Site but our address is impossible. To get there go to Google and Type Rare Pit and Plant Council. We'll be the first 'hit' that comes up. To write us on-line, use Debpits@aol.com and be sure to give a 'pit' title. If I don't know where something is from, I zap it. Deb