

The Pits

Fall & Winter 2010

In this issue: Mango, Papaya, Across-pit, gifts for gardeners and two recipes.

WHAT'S IN THE MARKET

Carambola, Cherimoya, Bitter melon, Black sapote, Date, Guava, Kumquat, Lemon grass, Mango, Olive, Papaya, Persimmon, Pili nuts, Pomegranate. Passion fruit, Prickly pear, Tamarillo, White sapote.

Notes in Passing:

A very sincere apology for the lateness of this letter. A good friend says, my computer has more crashes than they have at 'Indy' Here we are one new computer and several crashes later.

Remember December 21 is the first day of Spring on the window sill. Resume fertilizing when you see the first signs of new growth



Outside the greenhouse in the fall.

Oh Those Flowering Gifts!!

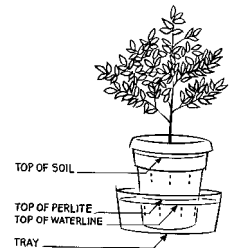
Cyclamen, Poinsettia, and Jasmine polyantha. Sometimes they only last through season. These three love it cool, not too wet and not to dry!!! They are perfect candidates for:

TEXAS POTTING

You will need:

1. Steak or roast carving fork (2 prongs)
2. A bag of perlite
 - A. With the steak fork make a double row of holes around the bottom of the pot.
 - B. Make another row of holes just below the lip of the pot.
 - C. Put the perlite in the bottom of the pot to just cover the double holes around the bottom.
 - D. Pot up your plant with regular potting soil. Water well.
 - E. Put the potted plants in a water tight container and fill the container to any height to just above the bottom row of holes. (This is a great way to leave plants when you travel.)
3. Appropriate sized plastic pots
4. A source for flame

The secret of this system is the upper row of holes. These holes supply air to the roots. Clay pots are porous and can be used without making air holes. If you use clay, put at least 2" of perlite in the bottom. This is also a great system with Rosemary.

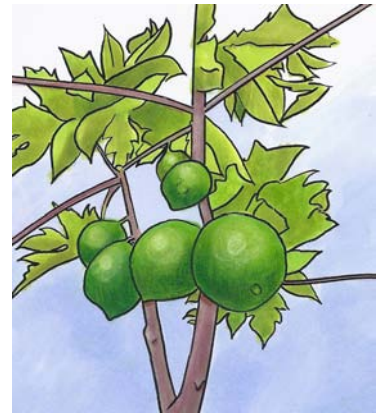


Carica papaya

Papaya

Papayas are exotic, tropical plants that make a dramatic statement in any plant collection. Their large deeply lobed leaves are larger than the human hand and form a rounded crown above the trunk.

Papayas are not for the faint of heart-these are large vigorous plants. In North Florida where the climate is too cool to grow them year round, they are grown as annuals. Seeds planted in February, will bear fruit by October or November and the tree may have reached 10' by that time.

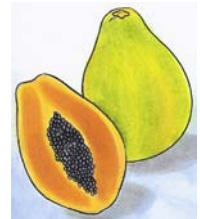


Such is not the case in the home, their growth is curtailed by life in a pot and the vagaries of the home environment. However, they do bloom and their waxy white flowers are fragrant. These bloom on the trunk below the foliage. When the fruits form, they look like balloons stuck to the trunk.

Papayas are hard to classify. They do not develop bark like most woody plants, the trunk remains smooth and succulent. Some botanists classify them as herbs, I've never understood why.

Most papayas are monoecious (requiring male and female trees to produce fruit) There are some hermaphroditic plants that have been developed from the Hawaiian 'Solo'. These are the seeds we want to find. Unfortunately commercial produce seems to be limited to Hawaii. These fruits are irradiated before entering the lower 48. I spent the summer searching for Papayas from the mainland, I found only one and it's not a Solo, but it is growing and will become a lovely plant.

When you cut open a papaya, you will see hundreds of seeds. They are about the size of a pepper corn and each seed is in a gelatinous sac (aril). To prepare the seed for sowing; put several layers of paper towels on the counter, take a spoonful of seeds and gently squish each seed on the towel until it sheds the aril. Take the cleaned seeds and let them dry on another paper towel. The seeds can be sown immediately into a flat or individual jiffy pots (see growing tips) or stored in an air-tight jar for a year. MARK THE JAR.



Dr. John's favorite dish is steak 'au poivre' so for his fiftieth birthday I bought a lovely London broil. I gently crushed the pepper corns into the meat to give it a spicy crust. Well you could have eaten that steak with a spoon. I'd accidentally used papaya seeds. They contain the enzyme Papain that is the main ingredient in meat tenderizing products.

Back to papaya. Logees Tropical Plants is offering a papaya cultivar, *Carica p.* 'TR Hovey'. It is a dwarf and meant to bear fruit within a year. It requires full sun, and temperatures above 60 degrees.

There is another interesting species of papaya, *Carica pentagona*; Babaco or the Mountain Papaya.. It is a small 6' shrub that is native to the high mountain areas of Ecuador and is much hardier than the commercial Papaya. The cylindrical fruits are seedless. Both the skin and the flesh are edible but "enhanced by a bit of sugar". They are available at the Raintree Nursery in Oregon. See sources.

Papayas are sensational plants, stunning to look at, and easy to grow, a must for every 'Pit' grower.

Growing tasty tropical plants*

*in any home anywhere.



Laurelynn G. Martin
and Byron E Martin

GIFTS FOR GARDENERS

I love this book!! I've been growing tropical fruits from seed for 30 years. I've had no single source of information that would tell me what to do once the plants emerge from the seed. It's been trial and error with more on the latter. Now we 'pit growers' have a wonderful, clear, and concise guide to the care and maintenance of our plants

The authors, Laurelynn G. Martin and Byron E. Martin are the co-owners of Logee's Tropical Plants and truly know whereof they speak. They have many greenhouses, each with climate controlled temperature, humidity and light. They are able to supply ideal growing conditions for each of these plants. (46 varieties)

Each section includes the plants common and botanic names, origin, height when it will bear fruit, culture; light, humidity, minimum and maximum temperatures, hardiness zones and pruning. There are clear photographs of the plants in fruit and illustrations of the plant in grown in their pots.

The book is choc-a-bloc full of all sorts of information. I have had a Cinnamon Tree for 8 years and I have learned I don't have to wait any longer to harvest my Cinnamon sticks. "Harvesting bark from young whips. (Whips I believe refer to the cut branches) Cut the whips into 3 inch segments. Score the bark length wise from end to end, cutting just deep enough to loosen the bark. Peel off the bark, which will naturally curl. Dry in an open airy warm room."

The section on plant care includes: Getting started from the bottom up, Maintaining your plants, Propagation, Pests and Diseases and Troubleshooting Guide. The information is extensive, clear and informative. This section in gardening books is referred to as "reinventing the wheel". They've made it all seem fresh and new.

If I have one complaint it is the ease with which the Martins talk about fruiting. I doubt I'll ever see my Vanilla bloom, or my Cocoa plant fruit. They have ideal growing conditions, but as the subtitle implies, there is at least one plant for your home 'anywhere'.DSP

Storey Publications
210 MASS MoCA Way
North Adams, MA 01247
\$18.00

PS: If you want to day dream on a cold winter's night go to www.logees.com

IS THE AERO GARDEN WORTH IT?

If you get "hort" magazines, or mail, you must have seen Aero Gardens ... compact little hydroponic farms with their own grow-light and nutrient supply, always photographed heavy with tomatoes or peppers, succulent herbs or award-standard blooms. Are they a good investment for an enthusiastic "Pit" or other chlorophyll addict?



Financially, the answer is "No" – the smallest 3-plant Aero Garden is \$60, the biggest 7-plant unit is \$200. Even at Whole Foods prices, you could buy a *lot* of produce for what one costs. As entertainment, though, they are worth almost what they cost. There is a fascination to watching a little green shoot grow

in a few weeks into a rosemary plant, a lettuce or a calendula, particularly in winter. Soothing for adults, exciting for kids.

Operating an Aero Garden is almost disappointingly simple. You pour in water, put the seed pods in their hole, add a nutrient pill and turn it on. The machine is programmed to give the optimum amount of light and warmth for each plant. From time to time, it will flash a light at you when it wants more water or more nutrients. And that is all. You can transplant your plants into soil if you wish (I have had mixed results at this) or leave them in the Aero Garden to be harvested as needed.

Madam Editor starts a batch of herbs in her Aero Garden in fall, and has fresh herbs all winter. I really like the Garden Starter system – a foam block with 66 finger-size holes into which you can poke a seed (or a Pit) to sprout and later transplant. Also, if you buy a new Aero garden (www.aerogarden.com), spring the extra \$20-30 for the extra-tall arm which lets you raise the lamp 24" high so your plants don't outgrow their home.

The Aero Garden dropout rate is high. A lot of owners lose interest or realize they will never feed a family of 6 with the produce of their machine. So check your local Craig's List; you may often see scarcely-used models for as little as \$40. There is relatively little that can go wrong; unless the 2nd-hand machine has been broken and fixed with duct tape, you're probably OK.

Happy Hydropitting!
CC



Generic Recipe for Fruit Juice Jellies

Clean the berries, removing all stems and over ripe fruits. Put in a large non-reactive pot. Add water to cover the berries by one inch. Boil about 10 minutes or until fruit is soft enough to be pressed with the back of a spoon or potato masher. Mash the fruit.

Line a large sieve with 2 layers of cheese cloth and place over a large bowl or pot. Pour in the extraction and let drip overnight.

For the jelly, measure 4 cups of juice and put in a large sauce pan. Add 5 cups of sugar, bring mixture to a boil for 20 minutes. Turn off the heat, add 3 oz of liquid pectin and bring to a boil for exactly one minute. Pour into sterilized jars.

Fruits with naturally low pectin content include tree fruits such as figs, cherries, nectarines, pears and soft berry fruit such as late varieties of blackberries, strawberries and elderberries. Edible stems of forced rhubarb and early and main crop varieties of rhubarb, frequently treated like a fruit in preserves, are naturally low in pectin content.

MANGO
Mangifera indica
India



FAQ What is your favorite plant? An impossible question, What's ever doing its thing at the time of the asking. The blooming Loquat, the fruiting Guava or the flowering Orchid? What is my fondest memory of a plant? That's easy. Gertrude, my Mango!

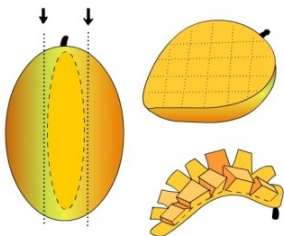
Gertrude was the first specimen plant I ever grew. I would take her with me whenever I gave a talk on growing Pits. After a couple of years she grew to heavy for the subway, and after that too large to fit in a cab. We moved a couple of times, but Gertrude always got the sunniest southern window.

She branched naturally at 2' and eventually reached a bushy 6 ½ feet. We saw eye to eye. Twice a year she would put on a flush of growth. Her leaves were 5 x 2" long, leathery and a dark glossy green. Her new growth was spectacular, new leaves would emerge, pale peach, turning pink, to deep red before turning green. She never bloomed, but the colorful new foliage made up for the lack of flowers.

My dream had always been to own a greenhouse, sit under my mango tree while a blizzard raged outside. I have the greenhouse now, but Gertrude died before she could be moved. Now I walk under my 7' Loquat.

Growing them is a challenge. First you must extract the large kidney shaped bean from the large hairy husk lodged in the center of the fruit. To do this, extract the husk and scrape off all the flesh. Let the husk dry overnight. Gently rock the husk back and forth on the edge of a counter until you see a narrow slit. (You may have to dry it another day.) Carefully insert a dull knife and pry open the husk and extract the seed..

Next fill a small plastic bag with barely moistened sphagnum moss (it should have a crumbly texture). Insert the seed making sure it is completely surrounded by the moss. Put the bag in a warm location (bottom heat if you have it). Check the bag every couple of days to make sure the moss is evenly moist, not too wet or dry. The seeds germinate in a couple of weeks. The leaves, trunk and roots develop at the same time. Let the trunk and leaves stick out of the bag, but do not transplant until you have 4" of roots. Transplant to a 4" pot, put a plastic dome over the pot to insure the humidity, and place the seedling in bright light, but not direct sunlight. If all this seems a bit tedious, it is well worth the effort. These are wonderful plants.



How to eat a Mango: Carefully make two horizontal slices, taking care not to nick the seed. Make diagonal cross cuts on each slice being careful not to break the skin. Fold the skin back, and individual chunks pop up making it easy to eat.

One subscriber described peeling the Mango, and putting it on a stick or a skewer much as you would a popsicle. My kids made a dreadful mess when I tried this.

