

Tropical & Subtropical Fruits for Orange County

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When growing any of the plants on this list keep in mind that many are still experimental and exact cultural practices have yet to be determined. Nothing on this list is foolproof, which is part of the adventure, but all have been successfully grown here. No guarantees!

The biggest challenge with many tropical plants is the root rot disease that can occur during our cool wet winter weather. Most tropical plants are evergreen and require healthy roots all year. Roots require oxygen as well as water to remain healthy. Most organic amendments consume oxygen as they decompose. Soils that are heavily amended (mixed) with organic materials can easily become oxygen deficient when waterlogged. We recommend that the soil be strictly mineral. Apply ample organic mulch, but keep it above the soil's surface. Most tropicals can be planted using the techniques discussed in our *Avocado* section.

Cherimoya

Annona cherimola

Delicious fruit looks like an alligator-strawberry cross and tastes like a mixture of pineapple, banana, and papaya. Requires hand pollination (only one tree needed-ask us for details) Provide average soil with decent drainage. Cherimoya can be grown as an espalier or as a tree to 20 feet tall. Drops foliage in the spring, then blooms, and grows leaves. Blooms late spring-summer. All varieties of Cherimoya taste very good to excellent. It is pointless to describe each variety in detail because the characteristics of the fruit vary greatly depending on the local climate. Cherimoyas grow best within 15 miles of the S. Calif. Coast. Some of the best-grafted varieties are described below:

El Bumpo Medium to large fruit with bumpy edible skin of excellent quality. Few seeds. Ripens winter to spring.

Fino de Jete Medium to large fruit with smooth skin and excellent flavor. Few seeds. Ripens fall-winter.

Honeyhart Medium size fruit with smooth skin and excellent quality. Few seeds. Ripens late fall to spring.

Knight (Bays, Ott) Medium to large fruit with smooth skin and very good lemon flavor. Ripens winter. Spreading tree. Best near coast. Originated in Mexico.

Pierce Medium to large fruit with smooth skin and excellent balance of sweet/tart. Originated as a seedling of Knight.

Cherry of the Rio Grande

Eugenia aggregata

Dark red 1-inch diameter fruit with fragile skin, soft sweet juicy flesh with a sweet cherry flavor. Harvest spring. Self-fertile but heavier crops when cross-pollinated. The handsome evergreen shrub or small tree has excellent ornamental value. It has small glossy green leaves and marbled-like exfoliating bark with shades of green cream, tan and pink. Growth is slow to moderate to 10-15' tall. Production starts when trees reach 6-8' tall. Provide ample water and good drainage. Hardy to 20°F.

Grumichama, Brazil

Cherry

Eugenia brasiliensis

The ¾" round, nearly black fruit taste much like true cherries. Fruit ripens early summer. The tree grows slowly, eventually reaching 10' or more in height and 6' or more wide. The foliage and lush deep green. Plants take several years to start production. Hardy to 20°F.

Surinam Cherry, Pitanga

Eugenia uniflora

These fruits resemble small pumpkins and range in color from light orange to red and nearly black. Fruit size ranges from ½" to over 1". Flavor ranges from sweet to acidic. There are usually 2 crops per year. This is a small tree or large bush to 10'+. It can be maintained as a hedge or trimmed into an enchanting small tree with smooth marbled-like bark. Hardy to 26°F.

Guavas

Includes 3 separate groups:

Pineapple Guava

Feijoa sellowiana

Easy to grow tasty fruit. The egg-shaped green fruit has a skin that is tough and tart, but the pulp and tiny seeds are delicious. Taste is like a mix of pineapple and banana. The plant is highly ornamental and can be grown as a 6-foot bush or as a small tree 10-20 feet tall. Hardy to 15 F. Provide sun, average soil and water. Somewhat drought tolerant when established.

Attractive flower show late spring and early summer. The edible white petals are sweet and perfumy. Fruit ripens in the fall. The best quality of fruit requires milder coastal climate. For best production and fruit quality plant 2 or more varieties. Some of the best are:

Coolidge Large mildly flavored fruit of good quality. Self-fertile.

Nazemetz Large pear shaped fruit of excellent quality. Very sweet smooth pulp and a thin skin. Self-fertile. BEST.

Unique Similar to Nazemetz

Strawberry Guava

Psidium cattleianum

Easy to grow tasty fruit. Small 1-2 inch round fruit with small hard seeds. The flesh is sweet and flavorful. The highly ornamental plant can be grown as a bush or a small tree to 15 feet tall. Selective pruning can create an attractive dooryard specimen. There are several crops per year. Provide sun, average soil, ample water. Hardy to 20 F. There are 2 kinds:

Red Strawberry Guava 1-inch fruit has red skin, a strong strawberry flavor and a small hard seeds. The plant has dense glossy green foliage and has outstanding ornamental value.

Yellow Strawberry Guava (Lemon guava) The 1 to 2-inch fruit has yellow skin, a milder sweet flavor and smaller softer seeds. The plant has larger, coarser less glossy foliage.

Tropical Guava

Psidium guajava

Easy to grow tasty fruit. Prized by many cultures but musty fragrance of ripe fruit may be unappealing to the uninitiated. Fruit size ranges from egg-size to apple-size. The skin is yellow when fully ripe and the flesh is sweet and creamy with a musky aroma. There are usually many small hard seeds in the central cavity. The plant is ornamental and semi-evergreen. Foliage drop and stem dieback occur with hard frosts. Hardy to 26 F.

Many varieties are offered. Some varieties are grown from seed, some are propagated by grafting, and some are propagated by air-layering. Grafted and air-layered plants are more expensive to produce, but are more reliably true to type and produce at an earlier age. Seed grown plants are less expensive, but fruit size and quality are not assured.

China White (Thai Giant, Bangkok Apple) very large (more than 1 pound) rounded fruit with firm white sweet flesh and a small seed cavity. Dwarf tree. Usually eaten when flesh is crunchy.

Beaumont medium to large (8 ounce), round fruit, pink flesh, mild flavor, seedy. Excellent for canning and juice. Vigorous, spreading, and productive tree. From Hawaii.

Mexican Cream Small fruit with creamy white flesh and a spicy flavor. Small tree.

Red Malaysian Medium size fruit with dingy yellow skin with firm rose pink flesh. The leaves are a striking burgundy purple and the flowers are pink. Also known as *Thai Maroon*, it is simply a red form of Thai guava.

South African Pink pink-fleshed pear shaped fruit with excellent mild flavor. Can be eaten when crisp.

Thai Large fruit with firm, white flesh.

Tropic Pink Large fruit with sweet pink flesh. From Persia.

Tropic White Medium size rounded fruit with firm, sweet white flesh. From Central America.

White Indian Very large round fruit with crispy white flesh.

Loquat

Eriobotrya japonica

Very popular in Asia, the Mediterranean region, and Central America. The sweet, tangy fruit has yellow to orange skin and white to yellow flesh and is from 1-3 inches in size. Usually contains 1-5 large seeds. The small tree (8-25 feet) is evergreen, highly ornamental, and drought resistant. Very easy to grow. Hardy to 20 F. Fruit ripens in winter-spring. Loquats can be grown from seed (fruiting within 4 years) but are often grafted to insure fruit quality. In our own experience the great majority of seedlings produce fruit of good quality. Some varieties are self-fertile, but some require cross-pollination.

Advance Large fruit with light yellow skin and white flesh. Very sweet and mild. Ripens mid spring.

Big Jim Very large fruit to 2 inches in diameter, with pale orange skin and flesh. Good sweet flavor. Ripens late spring. Self-fertile. Vigorous upright tree may not produce for several years.

Champagne Small oval fruit with pale orange skin and lighter flesh with excellent strong flavor. Ripens late winter-early spring. Best with pollinator.

McBeth Large fruit with orange skin and sweet orange flesh. Harvest spring. Self-fertile. Produces when young.

Vista White This seed-grown variety produces fruit similar to Advance.

Lychee *Leechee, Litchi*

Litchi chinensis

Highly prized fruit from China. Reddish cherry size fruit with leathery bumpy skin and white translucent mild flesh with a single seed. Slow growing evergreen tree bears when 5 feet tall and can eventually grow up to 40 feet. Hardy to 25 F. Self-fertile. Prefers cool dry winters and hot, wet, humid summers. Provide good drainage and deeply mulched moist sandy soil. Seedlings are seldom offered because they require many years to bear. Common named cultivars include:

Brewster Large fruit with red skin and soft flesh with a large seed. Ripens early summer. Large upright tree.

Mauritius (Kwai Mi) Medium size fruit with bright red smooth skin with a large seed. Ripens late spring. Vigorous, spreading tree with weak branching. *Mauritius* has been our best producer.

Longon

Euphoria longon

Similar to lychee in fruit and in culture (see Lychee). Tan or brown fruit 1 inch in diameter with sweet white flesh. Highly prized in Asia. Slow to moderate growing evergreen tree to 20 feet or more. Hardy to 24 F. plants sold are air-layered cuttings.

Kohala Medium to large fruit with brownish skin. The flesh is aromatic and spicy with very good to excellent quality. Small seed. The #1 commercial variety in Florida and Australia.

Mango

Mangifera indica

Very similar to culture and hardiness of the Avocado. Very popular fruit in the world's tropics and subtropics. In California grafted mango trees rarely exceed 15 ft. tall. Established plants are hardy to 26 F. Consult our 'Avocado Guide' for planting instructions. Mangos require excellent drainage, sunburn protection when young, and protection from cold winter winds. Near the coast mildew on flowers and leaves can ruin crops. Anthracnose, caused by excessive rain or sprinklers, can also cause problems.

Grafted mangos bear fruit within 2 years. Developing fruit should be pinched off young grafted mangos for several years to encourage faster growth. Seedling mangos will bear within 7-10 years. Fruit ripens summer-fall. There are many varieties available and it will take us years to sort out which are the best for our area.

Carrie Medium size fruit with greenish yellow skin. Flesh is very juicy, rich aromatic and fiberless. Excellent quality. Tree is semi-dwarf.

Edward Very large fruit with red blushed yellow skin. The firm flesh is juicy, rich, tender, and fiberless. Excellent quality. Tree is semi-dwarf. Not a heavy producer.

Glenn Medium to large fruit with red blushed yellow skin. The flesh is firm, fiberless, rich, aromatic, and spicy. Excellent quality. Strong flavor.

Haden The large fruit has scarlet blushed apricot skin. The firm flesh is juicy and rich with fiber near the seed. Very good to excellent quality.

Keitt Large fruit with pink blushed yellow skin and orange flesh, small seed. Fiberless. Very good quality. Resistant to anthracnose.

Kent Large fruit with pink blushed yellow skin and orange flesh. Fiberless. Excellent quality but late ripening period may lead to fruit rot.

Manila Small fruit with yellow skin. Fiberless with small seed. Susceptible to anthracnose. Bushy tree. This variety is usually grown from seed and may require up to 5-8 years to bear fruit.

Valencia Pride Medium to large fruit with yellow red skin. The flesh is sweet, juicy, and nearly fiberless. Quality is very good.

Passionfruit

Passiflora edulis

Passionfruit has the distinctive tropical flavor found in "Hawaiian Punch". The oval fruit is 2 inches in diameter with tough purple skin. The delicious yellow pulp surrounds small black seeds. This fast growing vine requires frost protection and good drainage. Avoid intense dry heat. High humidity helps production. Fruit ripens mostly fall-winter. On commercial farms the plants are usually replaced every few years. The more common purple fruit cultivars and seedlings are self fertile. The larger yellow fruited type requires either a purple type or genetically different yellow type for cross pollination.

Black Knight Highly fragrant, purple-black fruit as big as a chicken egg with excellent flavor. Compact self-fertile vine.

Frederick (Bountiful Beauty) Greenish purple fruit with reddish cast. Slightly tart, sweet flavor. Vigorous, self-fertile vine. Highly productive.

Nancy Garrison Egg size purple fruit.

Pineapple

Ananas comosus

Pineapple plants thrive in warm or hot weather in full sun. Fruit grown in the ground locally is usually small and tart. When grown in containers and given a bit of winter protection the fruit can reach commercial size. The plant is a bromeliad with spiny yucca-like leaves and grows about 3 feet tall and wide. Fruit develops within 2 years. Best when grown in black plastic containers with mostly volcanic rock or pumice with a bit of peat moss. Our Laguna Hills Nursery PLANTER MIX is perfect. Protect from frost by moving under house eaves during cold winter nights.

White Sapote

Casimiroa edulis

(Note: The name 'Sapote' is an ancient Aztec word thought to mean 'good fruit'. Some of the Sapote fruits are not related to each other.)

A little known fruit that deserves much more attention. Looks like a greenish yellow tomato with smooth, sweet delicious flesh with a flavor reminiscent of peach or banana. There are usually 3-5 large seeds. The fruit is picked hard and ripened at room temperature. A mature tree produces a huge crop (over 1000 pounds). The mostly evergreen tree (defoliates briefly) has attractive green palmately divided leaves. It can grow 20-50 feet tall and 20-30 feet wide. Grafted plants don't seem to grow with even a fraction of the vigor of seedlings. Fallen fruit is also a consideration. Seedling plants will produce fruit within 5-8 years.

Suebelle Small to medium fruit of excellent quality. Ripens nearly all year. Smaller and slower growing than other sapotes.

Lucmo

Pouteria lucuma

The brown, fuzzy fruit is round and variable in size. The flesh is relatively firm and there are 1-5 seeds. Very sweet with a chalky texture, in fact, the fresh fruit reminds one of the sweet bean paste found in Japanese confections. The harvest season is uncertain, but may be all year. The slow growing evergreen upright tree grows 20-30 feet tall. Hardy to 27 F. Fairly easy to grow. Native of Chile and Peru.

Chico Sapote, Sapodilla

Manilkara Zapota

Oval 2-3 inches fruit with thin skin and yellow-brown flesh that is soft, sweet, and delicious. Flavor is of pears and brown sugar. 1-10 seeds. Eaten fresh. The slow growing evergreen tree grows 50-75 feet tall. Highly ornamental with waxy, light green foliage. It grows best on well-drained soil, but can tolerate high salinity. Hardy to 27 F. native to Central America. The sap of this tree is used as a source of *chicle* for chewing gum. There are several producing trees in California. Research shows that production is better if the flowers are cross-pollinated and hand pollinated.

Black Sapote

Diospyros digyna, D. ebenaster

A tropical persimmon. The large shiny green fruit has chocolate colored soft flesh with up to 10 bean size seeds in the central core. Sweet. Eaten fresh or prepared. The fruit overwinters on the tree. The fast growing evergreen tree grows 20 feet or more. Like plenty of moisture. Hardy to 28 F. there are many productive trees in Southern Calif.

Starfruit

Averrhoa carambola

This unusual fruit looks like a golden cucumber and its cross section is a star shape. The fruit has tender skin and soft juicy flesh with a mild sweet flavor with a hint of astringency. Ripens winter. Eaten fresh or dried. The trees can grow 20 feet, but height is usually limited by wind damage. Provide good drainage and protection from cold winter winds and hot dry heat. In the ground Starfruit can succeed if grown under the house's eaves on the south side. Normal winter temperatures will severely damage this tree.

Arkin large deeply fluted fruit with golden skin and sweet juicy flesh with soft seeds. Ripens winter-spring.

Sri kembangan Very large fruit with bright golden skin and flesh. Juicy, rich, and sweet with few seeds. Excellent quality.

Ice Cream Bean-Tree

Inga edulis

This unusual fruit is best described as a pod filled with seedy grapes. The fat pods grow 1-2' long and contain numerous large bean seeds, each surrounded by a grape-size segment of sweet, juicy flesh. The flavor is similar to Lychee. The pods ripen in mid fall. This evergreen tree is highly ornamental and grows quickly. The low branches spread to 20' or more. The large leaves are divided into 6-8 large leaflets. In the tropics this tree has been used to provide light shade for coffee plants.

Kona Coffee

Coffee Arabica

Is relatively easy to grow. Plants should be located in filtered sun or partial sun. The soil should be moist with good drainage. Mulch deeply to help prevent salt buildup. The evergreen plant is an upright bush to 12 feet tall with very glossy deep green leaves. The flowers and resulting berries (which contain 2 beans each) occur all year. The beans are roasted before being ground and used to create the stimulating beverage.

Tea

Camellia sinensis

Is related to the ornamental camellias. The leaves are used to create tea. The plant grows as a dense rounded evergreen shrub to 15 feet tall with dark green leaves. Can be trimmed to a hedge. Relatively easy to grow if given partial to full sun (no reflected heat), rich soil, ample moisture, and decent drainage. Mulch deeply. The small white fragrant flowers bloom in fall.