







MANGOSTEEN

Mangosteen stands a step ahead of other fruits in taste and is called the queen of fruits. Home to Moluccas Island of the Malay Archipelago, the queen of fruits has widened her sway to Thailand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Burma, Vietnam, Malaysia and Hawaii successfully. But, the cultivation of this fruit in India has so far been limited to some pockets in South India. Because this tree bears in a rare biological phenomenon called parthenocarpy, in which fruition occurs without the aid of pollination, the fruits of Mangosteen are called virgin fruits. Seeds seen within the fruits also owe nothing to pollination or any contribution from a male counterpart. Trees grown from the seeds resemble all maternal qualities ditto.

The tree is medium built and can grow up to 15-20 metres high; main trunk shows upright growth, equally distanced lateral branches lend the tree a conical shape, leaves are shiny dark green in colour and oval shaped, all female flowers appear at the tips of small branches, fruits are globular in shape with rind colour becoming purple on ripening,

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each fruit weighs around 120 grams. Compared to the fruit size, the rind is rather heavy with a thickness up to one centimetre; beneath the skin can be seen 5-7 arils of snow-white colour which taste highly sweet and slightly acidic. The sweetness of Mangosteen fruits can be directly absorbed by the body, hence hypo glycaemia patients may be fed with these fruits when their blood sugar levels dip alarmingly. Taste is enhanced if eaten chilled.

The climate of Kerala with atmospheric temperature up to 36°C and relative humidity up to 90 percent is ideally suited for Mangosteen cultivation. A minimum of 200 centimetres rainfall is seen to ensure best growth. Though it grows well in any non-alkaline soil, 5.5-6.5 pH is found ideal. It requires shade in the early stage, but will have to be removed subsequently. Irrigation receives ideal response and better growth is observed where 1-1.5 metre tall plants are used for planting.

The commonly found diseases like gamboge and translucent flesh disorder (TFD) have been observed to remain under control to a great extent in well drained farms where planting is done on elevated platforms. Spraying of calcium nitrate @ three grams per litre of water thrice at an interval of 20 days after fruiting, is seen bringing gamboge under control. Both these diseases are not that rampant in areas of high elevation like Idukki and Wayanad. Moreover, fruits from those areas are seen to have acquired higher size and better taste in addition to the advantages of off-season fruiting nature. If the trees are top worked after ten years of growth, they begin to grow spread out instead of the normal vertical growth.