



Growing tree tomato in a kitchen garden

Tree tomato is also known as Tamarillo. The crop is easy to grow and manage and has egg-shaped edible fruits very rich in most nutritional components.



It is an excellent source of vitamins and minerals such as vitamins A, B, C, E and K, and is also high in minerals such as Calcium, Iron, Potassium, Phosphorus and Magnesium.

Varieties

The common varieties are: Ecuadorian orange, Gold mine, Inca gold, Red oratia, Rothame, Ruby red, Solid Gold and Yellow.

They are mainly differentiated by colours, ranging from yellow and orange to red and almost purple. Sometimes they have dark, longitudinal stripes. Red fruits are more acidic, whilst yellow and orange fruits are sweeter.



Planting Materials

Tree tomatoes can be started from seeds or cuttings. Seeds develop into high-branched erect shrub while cuttings develop into shorter bushy plants with low lying branches.

Unlike plants grown from cuttings, plants from seed are not always true to type.

From seeds



- Get seeds from ripe fruits
- Wash the seeds & dry them in the shade
- Plant them in boxes or other containers. They will germinate in 4 to 6 days.
- Transfer into polythene bags
- Transplant when 1.0 - 1.5m high.



From cuttings



- Cuttings should only be from plants which are 1 - 2 years old with a thickness of 1.5 to 2.5 cm (3/8 to 1 inch) and a length of 45 to 75 cm (18 to 30 inches).
- You can also buy the seedlings from registered tree nurseries

Planting

The spacing in the field varies depending on the management practices, soil fertility and environmental conditions. Either space:

- 3m between rows and 2.5 – 3.0m between plants in the row, or
- 4.5 - 5.0m between rows and 1.0 - 1.5m between plants in a row. Closer spacing is recommended in windy, unprotected locations.
- During planting, put 2 debes of well decomposed manure plus 150g of DAP or TSP per hole, mix well with soil then plant.

Management

- **Weeding:** Tamarillo is shallow rooted plant. Shallow weeding should be done with care to avoid damaging the roots.
- **De-budding:** De-bud trees when they are 1.5-2m (3-4ft) to promote multiple branching.
- **Pruning:** Pruning helps to control plant and fruit size and harvesting. If timed properly pruning can extend the total bearing period of the tree. Newly grown tree tomatoes should be pruned to a height of 90-120cm (3-4ft) to encourage branching.
- Yearly pruning thereafter is recommended to eliminate branches that have already borne because fruits are produced on new growth.



Pests and Diseases

The tree tomato is susceptible to a number of pests and diseases which can be controlled with proper care.

- The main pests that attack the tree include: Aphids, Thrips, Whiteflies, Nematodes and Fruit flies.
- Maintain good field sanitation and apply plant extracts e.g chilies, African marigold, garlic, neem to control pests.



The common diseases are:

- Powdery mildew: Causes severe leaf fall. Apply neem oil sprays, fungicides like copper oxychloride to control.
- Root & Crown rot and Wilt: Maintain good cultural practices to control.

Harvesting

- Tree tomatoes usually start to bear fruits within 18 months of planting.
- They usually come into full production within 3 or 4 years.
- Fruits are ready to harvest when they develop the red or yellow colour.
- To harvest simply pull the fruits from the shrubs with a snapping motion leaving the stalk attached. Well-nourished plants can produce up to 66 kg per year.
- You can pick fruits twice a week for the whole year except when you spray them to control pests and diseases.