PLANT FACT SHEET

Litchi chinensis Sonnerat

GENUS *Litchi* **FAMILY** Sapindaceae

COMMON NAMES Litchi, Lychee

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, seeds - aril

The fleshy pulp around the seeds is eaten. They are eaten fresh, preserved or dried. They are pickled, canned, used in jams. sauces, fruit salads, ice cream and made into wine.
Dried tea leaves are soaked in lychee juice then dried again to impart a lychee flavour.

DESCRIPTION

A medium sized evergreen tree. It grows up to 15 m tall but can be 35 m tall. It has a dense round crown. The trunk is smooth and grey with brittle trunk and branches. The trunk can be 1 m across. Leaves are shiny and light green. The leaves are reddish when young. They are leathery and divided into 4-8 leaflets. The leaflets are oval and taper to the tip. The flowers are pale green and in loosely branched groups at the ends of branches. It bears bunches of rough skinned pinkish fruit 3-4 cm across. These droop in clusters. There are 3 subspecies ssp. chinensis, ssp. philippinensis, ssp. javensis. There are many cultivated varieties.

HABITAT

A subtropical plant. It is native to Asia from China to Malaysia. It suits the tropical highlands. It grows satisfactorily in the humid equatorial coastal areas but does not fruit. For fruiting it needs to be at a higher altitude or latitude because it has a cold temperature chilling requirement. Most varieties need between 100 and 200 hours of standard chilling (0° and 7°C). It needs a deep moist soil and freedom from frost. Trees can stand temperatures down to -2°C when mature. Temperatures below 5°C at flowering upset normal flower opening. Cool dry climates are important. Temperatures between 20-38°C suit good fruiting. Although litchi will grow on a range of soils, well drained soils are best. A pH between 5.5 and 7.5 is suitable. In Brisbane Botanical Gardens. In XTBG Yunnan. It suits hardiness zones 10-11.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Trees are mostly grown from seed but they do not breed true and are slow to produce. Trees can be propagated by aerial layering, grafting or cuttings. Air layering is best. Seeds do not store well (4-5 days), so fresh seed must be sown. Air layers on mature branches in the warmer season are best. Branches of 2 to 2.5 cm across with 45 cm of shoot are suitable for air layers. A spacing between trees of 10-12 m is suitable. Good soil preparation prior to planting enables good early growth. Organic matter dug in over 1 metre square and 30 cm deep 3 months before planting is good. A stick for support of the young plant and shelter are needed at planting. A pH

of 5.5 to 6.0 is required. Because it is shallow rooting, cultivation should be avoided and mulching practised. Small amounts of fertiliser added often is the appropriate method. Lychee trees have a high water consumption. Only limited tree training is required. Often no general pruning is required. Plants need adequate water but not waterlogged soil.

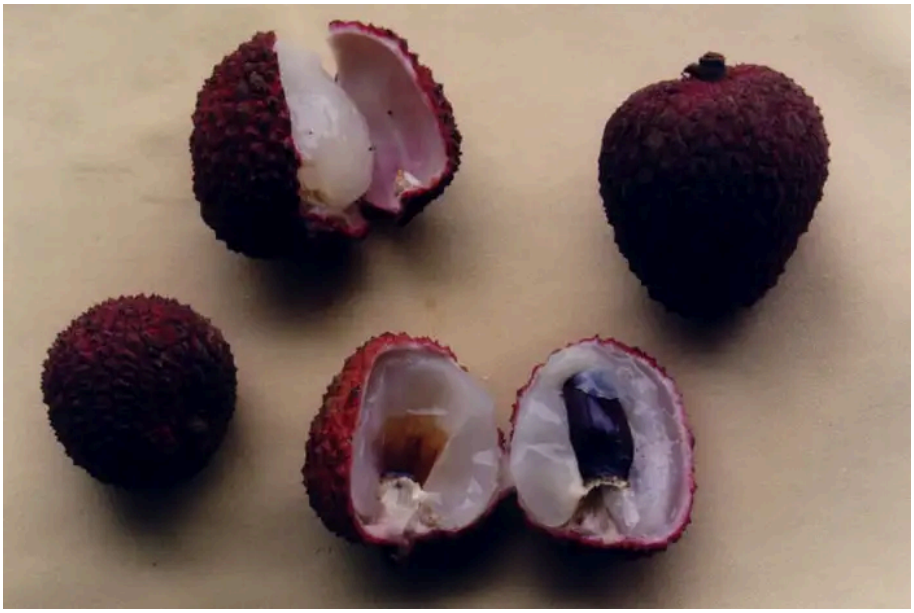
Harvesting and Seed Production

Seedling trees take 8-12 years to start fruiting. Vegetatively propagated trees bear in 4-6 years. Fruiting is normally seasonal. It takes 140 days from flowering to fruit maturity. Fruit need to be harvested ripe from the tree. The normal harvesting method is to remove the fruit with a few cm of the stem still attached. Early fruit set is affected by vegetative growth at flowering. Insects (bees) are important for fruit set. Wind breaks are essential because wind at flowering can reduce fruit set. A 20 year old tree can produce 5,000 fruit or 100 kg.

NOTES

There is only one Litchi species.

PICTURES



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