

TREE TOMATO

Tamarillo, Arbol De Tomate

Cyphomandra betacea

Solanaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

Tree tomatoes are small, half-woody, fast growing, brittle shallow-rooted trees reaching 10-18 ft (3-5.5 m) in height that are native to South American highlands. Argentine seed was first imported into the U. S. in 1913.

Uses

Tree tomatoes are edible and can be consumed either as a fruit or vegetable.

Cultivation

In the tropics, tree tomatoes do best at elevations between 1500 and 3000 m. Frost will partially kill the plants at -2° C (28° F). It does not tolerate drought. It is best planted in fertile, light, well-drained soil. Standing water, even for a few days, will also kill the plant. Trees can be started either from seed (produces a high branched erect tree) or from cuttings (produces a shorter bushy plant with low lying branches). Seed can be placed in the freezer for 24 hours before planting to increase germination. Cuttings should be of 1- to 2-year-old wood 3/8 to 1 in (10-25 mm) thick and 18 to 30 in (45-75 cm) long. They can be planted directly in the field and, while precocious, should not be permitted to fruit in the first year. Trees are planted approximately 32 in apart in rows 6.5 ft apart. Pruning seedling trees is recommended down to 3-4 ft the first year, and annual pruning to eliminate branches that have already fruited should be carried out because fruiting occurs on new growth. Early spring pruning brings an earlier harvest; fall pruning brings a delayed harvest.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The tree usually begins to bear when 1.5 to 2 years old and continues to be productive for 5 or 6 years. The fruit is ready to harvest when it has reached either the yellow or red color of its' variety. They should be pulled from the tree with the stem attached. The fruit may be stored in a refrigerator for eating. For seed, separate the seeds from the pulp and let dry to humidity of 15%. Tree does not always come true to seed, but is more likely to if seed is taken from red fruits with black seed pulp or yellow fruits with yellow seed pulp.

Pests and Diseases

Tree tomato is generally regarded as disease resistant but it may be attacked by green aphids and/or fruit flies in areas where these problems occur. Nematodes are a potential problem. Powdery mildew may also be a problem and will cause defoliation if not controlled.

Cooking and Nutrition

Tree tomatoes may be eaten raw or "baked in the half shell", or peeled, sliced and used in desserts, salads, sandwiches, soups, preserves etc. The fruit should not be cut on a wooden or other permeable surface as it will leave an indelible stain. Ripe tree tomatoes may be cut in half lengthwise, sprinkled with sugar and eaten by scooping out the pulp. For other purposes, the skin must be removed by pouring boiling water over the fruit and letting it stand for 4 minutes before peeling.