

Black Sapote

Botanical Name: *Diospyros digyna* (Ebenaceae)

Common Name: Black Sapote, 'Chocolate Pudding Fruit Tree', Chocolate Persimmon and Zapote Prieto (in Spanish)

Origin: The Black Sapote is native to Mexico

Distribution: Mexico, Central America, Cuba, Philippines.

Australian Distribution: It is cultivated in Australia and other tropical countries as a minor crop. Many seedling and improved varieties exist in Australia.

Preferred Climate and Soil Types: Black Sapote trees can grow on a range of soil types but thrives on moist sandy loam, and can tolerate short periods of flooding. The tree grows fairly slowly for the first 3–4 years, perhaps just 30 centimetres per year for the first couple of years. Later however it grows much more rapidly. Trees should be spaced 8-10m apart.

Description: Fruits of the Black Sapote can be eaten fresh (without the skin), used to make ice cream or mixed in fruit juices. The evergreen tree is slow-growing to 10 metres in the Darwin region, with a furrowed trunk and black bark. Leaves are large, glossy and leathery. Flowers are tubular and white. The fruit is bright-green and shiny at first, then on ripening, the smooth, thin skin becomes olive-green and then rather muddy-green. Within is a mass of glossy, brown to very dark-brown, almost black, somewhat jelly-like pulp, soft, sweet and mild in flavour. In the centre, there may be 1 to 4 flat, smooth, brown seeds, but the fruits are often seedless. When fully ripe the flesh tastes like chocolate. Unripened it can be slightly bitter.

Varieties: The range in size of trees, shape, seediness, flesh colour and sweetness of fruit; and time of fruiting suggest that considerable genetic variability exists. It is therefore best to look for grafted trees of improved cultivars.

Australian cultivars

'Bernicker' (also 'Bernecker') is a prolific producer of nearly spherical, medium to large fruit with few seeds and of superior quality.

'Mossman' has very large, round fruit of medium flavour with high pulp content and few seeds, and is capable of producing up to 450 kg per tree.

'Maher' has very large, flattened fruit of good to very good quality with few seeds. It is uniquely known among cultivars for being a small, yet prolific tree (up to 4 metres).

'Ricks Late' originated in NSW Australia and produces heavy, late crops with excellent quality fruit.

'Superb' is a selection from North Queensland that bears large quantities of superb quality, small fruits that may be completely seedless if not cross pollinated.

'Cocktail' is described as having excellent flavour.

In the NT the T/A.1 Black Sapote is the most planted locally.

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Culture: Seedling trees usually take 5 – 7 years to fruit. Grafted trees will fruit within 2 years and are a more compact tree. They are heavy bearers. Water regularly throughout the dry season. Pruning is generally not necessary unless you want to reduce size for easier management.

Pests and Diseases: Other than scale, it appears to have few pests or diseases.

Fruiting Season: All year round in the Darwin region.

Harvesting: The fruit is harvested when the ‘cap’ on top slightly recedes to the stem and the edges of the cap lift off the fruit all round. It will then take 3-4 days to ripen. Fully ripe, the pulp can be eaten as is or with a squeeze of lime, passionfruit or cream. Ripe fruit is cut in half crossways to the seeds and with a slight twist the two halves separate, if any, remove the seeds and scoop out the pulp.

The flavour is further enhanced by the addition of rum, vanilla, cream or coffee liqueur (Kahlua or Tia Maria). It makes a delicious ice cream and is also great in mousses, cakes, cheesecakes, muffins, breads and preserves. It is proving popular as an ingredient in tropical fruit wines. Unripe fruits are astringent, caustic, bitter, and an irritant.



Contact Us

Phone: 8930 0300

Street Address: Harry Chan Avenue, Darwin NT 0800

Postal Address: GPO Box 84, Darwin NT 0801

E-mail: darwin@darwin.nt.gov.au

