

Pomegranate

Botanical Name: *Punica granatum* (Lythraceae)

Common Name: Pomegranate, Melograno (in Italian), Granaatappel (in German). The Latin words for apple (pomum) and seeded (granatus) are combined to form the English name Pomegranate (i.e. Seeded apple). Anar or Anaar (in Hindi/Urdu and Punjabi).

Origin: The Middle East. The Pomegranate dates back to before recorded history. The ancient Greeks and Persians thought the Pomegranate had some mystic connection with procreation because of its many prominent seeds. It was also used as a medicine against diarrhea and intestinal parasites.

Distribution: The main areas of world production are Turkey, Spain and California. Also found throughout The Middle East, South China and South East Asia, and the Mediterranean.

Australian Distribution: **Small commercial production** in southern and central regions of NSW, VIC, SA and WA. It is a popular backyard tree in southern states.

Preferred Climate and Soil Types: They grow best under semi-arid conditions, as the humidity of the Darwin region can lower fruit quality and increase the chance of fungal disease. Pomegranates can be grown on a wide variety of soils, but prefer a sandy loam or deep loam. The quality and colour of fruit will be a reflection of the soil type.

Description: The Pomegranate is a partly deciduous and even evergreen tree in the tropics and sub-tropics. It is a small tree or bush, 3-4 metres, with many stems forming an irregular crown. They have glossy, green leaves, and large, orange, hibiscus like blossoms which also makes them desirable ornamentals.

The fruits have a thick reddish-brown skin when ripe. Inside are many seeds which are all surrounded by a juicy pulp. The colour of this pulp varies from white to light red, deep red and sometimes purple. There are many cultivars with a lot of variation in fruit size and colour, juice content, taste, hardness of seed, and other characteristics. Pomegranate fruits are eaten fresh or are used to produce juice.

Varieties: 'Guloshia rosavaya', 'Wonderful'. The Pomegranate has over 500 named cultivars, with fruit size, skin colour, flesh colour, juice content, sweetness and acidity the varying factors.

Culture: Pomegranates will survive under dry conditions but fruit better where they receive adequate supplementary water. The fertilizer needs of the Pomegranate are moderate compared with most fruit trees. For the first four years, apply a complete NPK mix fertilizer each month from August to March.

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Pruning should be confined to the removal of suckers, dead wood and cross branches to aid quality fruit production. They grow easily from seed, but are commonly propagated from 25–50 centimetre hardwood cuttings to avoid the genetic variation of seedlings. Air layering is also an option for propagation. The pH should be 5.5 to 7.0, but the plant will grow well in slightly alkaline soils.

Pests and Diseases: Internationally, the Pomegranate butterfly, *Virachola isocrates*, is a major pest. It lays eggs on the flower-buds of developing fruits and in a few days the caterpillars enter the fruit. In Australia, fruit fly, aphids, parrots and rats can cause problems. Excessive rain during the ripening season may induce a rot in the fruit.

Fruiting Season: March/April

Harvesting: Fruit may be allowed to ripen on the tree and then harvested. They are generally considered ready for harvest when the fruit makes a metallic sound when tapped. The Pomegranate is equal to the apple in having a long storage life, and improves in storage, becoming juicier with more flavour. Relative humidity will reduce their storage life.



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