

Farm Query

Paddy variety

Where can I get information on IET 7564 paddy variety? Is there any farmer cultivating it in Tamil Nadu?

S. JAGADEESAN, Tamil Nadu

The duration of IET-7564 (Prasanna) variety is 78 days. The grains are coarse and sturdy. About 2 tonnes can be harvested from an acre and is most suitable for delta areas. You can contact Mr. S. Ranganathan, Chairman, Centre for Cauvery Delta development studies and General Secretary, Tamil Nadu Cauvery Delta Farmers Welfare Association, No 126- first street, Lakshmi Bhavanam, Mannargudi-641-001, Tiruvarur district, Tamil Nadu, email: sranganathanratnam@gmail.com, phone: 04367-252170, mobile: 9442281037 for details.

Pick of the season

Fruits have tremendous healing powers. Eat lots of fruit, but make sure it's fresh, local and in season



DELIGHTFUL The colours of good health

The climb's vaguely startling. We're in Malaysia and little Penang island's lushly fertile forests seem like a kindergarten drawing, blithely combining the impossible. After all, we're used to Indian supermarkets, offering just about a dozen fruit, some flown in across ridiculous distances. In Penang, however, there's an emphasis on eating and growing a gasp-worthy variety of produce, so consumers have the privilege of taking fresh, juicy, naturally ripened fruit for granted.

Fruit fare

Our van wheezes towards the Tropical Fruit Farm, perched 800 feet above sea level, in the hilly area of Teluk Bahang. Over the years about 370 species of edible fruits have grown in these hills. They come from tropical and sub-tropical fruit trees, many of which originate from suitably exotic locations, including Central Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific islands.

Of course, the farm's a diverting novelty for tourists. There's a languorous toddler-trek with a guide to point out photogenic fruit dangling plumply from the trees. A luscious fruit buffet, a jewel box of exotic fruit, tempting you to try unfamiliar varieties of fruit. And, of course, a souvenir shop with nutmeg balm, citronella oil and — gasp — bug magnets.

However, the farm's most powerful *raison d'être* is really re-introducing people to the glories of fresh, locally grown, chemical-free fruit. To showcase how deliciously sophisticated the flavour of a naturally ripened fruit can be, whether it's a humble banana or a striking rambutan. To emphasise the importance of knowing where your food comes from. And to remind people about the tremendous powers of healing that fruits can have. Especially important for our generation of placid paracetamol-poppers.

Perhaps it's because we've been lectured too often — we know all about how important it is to eat fruit, but, yawn, it seems so much easier to chew on Vitamin C than gnaw unglamorously on a guava.

Power packed

Well, listen up. A guava is a powerhouse of vitamins; it has A for your eyesight, B for metabolism and C for glowing skin. Then there's fibre to aid digestion and essential minerals to keep your body functioning like a well oiled Italian sports car.

Over hunks of bright dragon fruit that stain our fingers pink, succulent slices of delicate melons and juicy pineapple that tastes like sunshine, we're let into the secret world of wonder fruit.

Can't sleep? Try fresh nutmeg with milk. Think papaya's boring? Its leaves are heated and used to treat rheumatism. The latex from the fruit is used to treat skin ulcers. And the pulp makes a great face pack by the way.

Penang's climate makes it possible to grow over 250 varieties of fruit at the farm. It's astonishingly liberating to know there's so much more out there than just apples, pears and oranges. This farm alone features a host of delightfully outlandish fruit.

The quirky Ice Cream Bean, with its thick, white pulp that tastes like vanilla ice-cream. The Delicious Monster, a cross between jackfruit and pineapple. Or kumquats with sweet rinds and sour centres.

The Consumer's Association of Penang vehemently opposes imported fruit. And for a good reason.

In their handbook *Fruits: A Nutrition Guide* they talk of how many of these are cloaked in a cocktail of chemicals. They're sprayed with preservatives to appear fresh, coloured with additives to look good and coated with wax to reduce moisture loss.

With this treatment apples can last for up to 16 weeks, oranges up to 8 weeks, while avocados, plums and mangoes can last a month.

They will, however, do you more harm than good. As anyone who has ever dated a pretty airhead knows, appearances can be frighteningly deceptive.

So here's your lesson for the day: Eat lots of fruit. But make sure it's fresh, local and in season. So what if your papaya's ugly? You're eating it for its goodness, not putting it in a tuxedo and taking it for dinner, right?

Designing landscapes to conserve species

S. HARPAL SINGH



Rugged, hilly landscapes with a range of different habitat types can help maintain more stable butterfly populations, aiding their conservation, showing the way to design landscapes that help conserve species, says a study.

Determining properties of leaves by ultrasound

C.V. SUBRAHMANYAM



The water content of leaves, thickness, density and other properties can now be determined by ultrasound. The voice of the leaves informs about their status and properties by ultrasound, at above-audible frequencies.

Global warming helping trees grow faster

WASHINGTON: Global warming is helping trees to grow at a faster rate now than they have done in the past 200 years due to higher temperatures and more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, American researchers have claimed.

After studying the growth of 55 forests in the eastern United States for over 20 years, the scientists from the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Maryland found that the recent tree growth "greatly exceeded the expected growth".

They suggested that global warming is helping trees to grow faster as it brings higher temperatures, longer growing seasons and more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

In one forest, studied by the researchers, an extra 1.8 tonnes of timber per acre is appearing each year. "The trees, in Maryland, are sprouting up more quickly than at any time in the past 225 years," the scientists said.

Lead researcher Geoffrey Parker said: "We made a list of reasons why these forests could be growing faster and then ruled half of them out".

"The best explanation was a response to climate change, he was quotes as saying by the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

In the past 22 years, carbon dioxide levels where the study was conducted had risen 12 per cent, the average temperature had increased by nearly three tenths of a degree, and the growing season had lengthened by 7.8 days.



Oil rises above USD 77 per barrel

Tags : crude oil, price Posted: Wednesday, Feb 17, 2010 at 0907 hrs Singapore:

Oil edged up above \$77 a barrel on Wednesday, supported by the weaker dollar and rally in equities markets, as optimism over the global economy stoked hopes for higher fuel demand.

Asian stock markets, led by Japan and Hong Kong, extended their rise after US shares posted their biggest daily percentage gain in three months on Tuesday, signalling a return of risk appetite among investors.

US crude for March delivery rose 26 cents to \$77.27 a barrel at 0353 GMT, marked by thin trading volumes, after closing 3.9 per cent higher on Tuesday, the highest percentage gain since the 5.8 per cent rise on Sept. 30.

London ICE Brent for April climbed 22 cents to \$75.90 a barrel.

"The market is purely focused on expectations of an economic recovery rather than on inventories," said Jonathan Barratt, managing director of Commodities Broking Services in Sydney. "The inventory build-up will in itself help contain the prices. But people feel that demand will continue to rise."