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ACEROLA IS AN EXCELLENT SOURCE OF VITAMIN C

Among tropical fruits, Acerola contains some of the highest levels of vitamin C. It is known, also, as Barbados cherry or Puerto Rican cherry. Acerola was grown in Hawaii's past in commercial production of vitamin C until a method was developed to synthesize the vitamin. Hawaii climate, ranging from low 60s to high 80s, is ideal for Acerola tree and fruit production which today is grown primarily as a home garden ornamental.

Varieties

Of the sweet and sour types, sweet Acerola is preferred in home plantings. Sweet varieties include: Tropical Ruby, Hawaiian Queen, and Manoa Sweet. Generally, Manoa Sweet is recommended for home plantings. Manoa Sweet grows to a height of 15 feet and has excellent yields. When fully ripe the fruit is orange-red in color, is sweet, and has flavor that wins acceptance with many home gardeners.

Sour varieties, on the other hand, include: J.H. Beaumont, C.F. Rehnborg, and Haley. These varieties are better adapted to drier areas. Maunawili in areas of high rainfall is a superior performer. Red Jumbo is another variety with attractive large fruit which range from cherry-red to pruplish-red when fully mature.

Soil Management and Fertilization

A well drained soil is required for healthy Acerola growth and production. This tree can tolerate 5.0 to 7.0 pH ranges. An application of lime will help to counteract an acid soil below pH 5.0. Nutritional sprays containing copper, zinc, iron, and manganese are beneficial to alkaline soils. Follow manufacturer's recommendations which are found on the label. Applying phosphorus fertilizer such as 10-30-10 or superphosphate before planting will enhance root growth. When using fertilizers such as 16-16-16 or 10-20-20, a handful or the granules is about 1/4 of a pound. Use one pound scattered within the drip zone for each one inch of trunk diameter per year. Fertilization is recommended every 3 to 4 months.

Propagation and Planting

Plants, generally, are propagated from cuttings. Another means of propagation is from seeds, though many varieties have a very poor germination role. The growth patterns also may be unpredictable especially from seeds. And, when they fruit, the vitamin C content may show some variations in amount of the vitamin present.

When planting Acerola, provide about 10 to 15 feet between trees so the branches will have adequate space in which to grow. This is true for the home garden also. Otherwise, crowding will hamper growth and fruit production.

Irrigation

Irrigate as often as is needed. This need will be indicated by the soil under the tree. Take a small hand spade which is used in the garden, push into the soil and lift up. If the soil six inches down is moist, do not water. If that soil is dry, irrigate. Do not water by the calendar for you may be adding too much, or too little water. Pay particular attention during hot, dry, windy periods. If too little water is applied, tree growth and fruit production will be restricted.

Insects and Diseases

White flies, thrips, spider mites, fruit flies, and scale insects attack plant and/or fruit of the Acerola. Cercospora leaf spot is a problem where rainfall per year exceeds 100 inches. At present no chemicals have been cleared for use against either insects or diseases on Acerola.

Harvest

In two or three years after planting, the tree will begin to bear fruit. An average tree will flower from February to December and will yield 10 to 150 pounds of fruit each year. This, of course, depends upon the care given the tree. Acerola is harvested when the fruit turns red. It should be processed immediately. The taste may range from sweet to sour. It is palatable and resembles a mild taste of the guava-carambola combination.

Birds may do a great deal of damage to the fruit. This is particularly true when the fruit is left on the tree to ripen beyond harvesting stage.

NOTE: The use of trade names is for the convenience of readers only and does not constitute an endorsement of these products by the University of Hawaii, the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, The Hawaii Cooperative Extension Service and their employees.

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