

## BREVARD RARE FRUIT COUNCIL – ARTICLE ARCHIVES

**ARTICLE:** MANGOS IN FLORIDA by Bill Monroe

**B**efore you purchase a mango first ask yourself what is the best mango. Best? I suppose that's rather objective and none specific. Best could be either taste, fruit production, or resistance to Anthracnose. The mango known by its scientific name *Mangifera indica* is a member on the cashew family. Commercially the mango can be found growing in southern Florida and on the tip of Merritt Island. Dave Reid wrote an excellent article for "Florida Gardening" magazine Aug/Sep 2000 titled "Merritt Island Mangos" which speaks to growing mangos on the island. Lets explore the mango a little further...living beachside or bayside and growing mangos as a hobby your interested in variety, cultivation, growth from seeds, and cold protection.

Before we dive deeper into mangos and what is the best mango we first need to do

some exploring and explaining. I detest the scientific mumbo-jumbo, so here it goes in layman's language. There are two main varieties of mangos. The first variety originated in India, has the bright colors and blushes we all know, but is susceptible to Anthracnose, poor fruit set, and doesn't come true from seed. The second variety originated in Indochina or the Philippines and lacks the bright colors often displaying either a pale green or yellow when ripe, but this variety is resistant to anthracnose, has good

to excellent fruit set, and does come true from seed. The original commercial mango "Haden" along with the more recent Tommy Atkins and Keitt owe their lines to the Indian mango variety. All three have excellent color, size, and handle shipping well. That is the main reason why we see the Indian variety of mango in the produce section of your local market. Certainly the Tommy Atkins and Keitt are sound mangos, but remember the focus is on backyard production and not commercial production. In your backyard or spare lot the average grower lacks the equipment and chemicals for commercial production. Hence I would suggest that purchasing a variety with origins from Indochina or the Philippines would be your best choice with regard to fruit production and resistance to Anthracnose, but not always the best choice where taste is concerned. Remember that taste is subjective.

When is the best time to plant a mango? According to T.W. Young and Julian W. Sauls authors of "The Mango Industry in Florida" "anytime of the year is good, provided the weather is warm, the trees are not in active growth and precautions are taken against freezes or droughts which follow the setting of the trees." The mango isn't fussy when it comes to soil requirements. In fact the mango can be found growing in the muck, acid soil, and sandy dunes throughout the various southern

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counties. Mature mangos are fairly drought tolerant with irrigation only to prevent severe leaf shed. Plant your mango in an area that's elevated. Young mentions that with regard to cold protection "a difference of a few feet in elevation may be important even in areas where a terrain is almost flat. With elevation and proper weed clearance cold air is not trapped beneath the tree. When fertilizing remember that Nitrogen and Potassium leaches from the soil and must be replenished, but Phosphorus can be omitted for short periods of time.

Will a mango come true from seed? It depends on the variety. Young and Sauls state that "seeds consists of either one embryo resulting from the sexual process of union of sperm with the egg or two to five or more embryos, one of which is produced sexually and the others developed from nucellar tissue." Just remember that Indian mangos are monoembryonic while the Indochinese types are polyembryonic. Okay? Still with me? Good. Polyembryonic or Indochinese variety of mangos will produce trees that are relatively true to the parent. Monoembryonic or Indian variety of mangos will not. If your not sure what you have remember that Indian mangos are colorful while Indochinese varieties are pale green or yellow when ripe. Mangos grown from seed will produce fruit in 7 to 9 years.

Cold protection and the effect of cold can take a variety of forms.

Proper placement of the tree has a lot to do with cold protection. Plant the tree on an elevated area, use cold hardy fruit trees such as loquats as wind breaks and protective canopies. Cold can be blessing or a curse to mangos. If the cold comes early and doesn't stick around, it will produce an early bloom. If the cold returns when the bloom is set then "nubbins" are produced. What is a nubbin? A nubbin is a production of small fruit with aborted embryos, or small fruit with no seeds. This is most apparent in Ed Ensey's Haden crop from this year. Some of his Haden mango trees were full of small fruit. Ed was able to sell them none the less at a discount.

So what mango do you plant is you have room for only one? If you don't have an immediate favorite try one of the Indochinese varieties until you find one you like. Purchase a grafted variety in a seven gallon pot and the following year, if not the next, you'll begin to have fruit production. Indochinese varieties are not as susceptible to anthracnose, grow true from seed (Polyembryonic), produce heavy crops unlike the Indian varieties, but are not as colorful or resistant to rough handling during shipping. So what is the best mango? It depends on your definition of best and whether you are a backyard grower doing commercial production. As someone once said "the best mango is the one currently in my hand." Enjoy!