



Eriobotrya japonica

The loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*) (from Cantonese Chinese: 盧橘; Jyutping: lougwat, nowadays called Chinese: 枇杷; pinyin: pípá; Jyutping: pei paa) is a species of flowering plant in the family Rosaceae, a native to the cooler hill regions of China to south-central China. It is also quite common in Japan, Korea, hilly Regions of India (Himachal), Northern Areas of Pakistan and some can be found in some Northern part of the Philippines, and hill country in Sri Lanka.

It is a large evergreen shrub or tree, grown commercially for its yellow fruit, and also cultivated as an ornamental plant.

Eriobotrya japonica was formerly thought to be closely related to the genus *Mespilus*, and is still sometimes known as the Japanese medlar. It is also known as Japanese plum and Chinese plum, also known as pipa in China.

Description

Eriobotrya japonica is a large evergreen shrub or small tree, with a rounded crown, short trunk and woolly new twigs. The tree can grow to 5–10 metres (16–33 ft) tall, but is often smaller, about 3–4 metres (10–13 ft). The fruit begins to ripen during Spring to Summer depending on the temperature on the area. The leaves are alternate, simple, 10–25 centimetres (4–10 in) long, dark green, tough and leathery in texture, with a serrated margin, and densely velvety-hairy below with thick yellow-brown pubescence; the young leaves are also densely pubescent above, but this soon rubs off.

Fruit

Loquats are unusual among fruit trees in that the flowers appear in the autumn or early winter, and the fruits are ripe at any time from early spring to early summer. The flowers are 2 cm (1 in) in diameter, white, with five petals, and produced in stiff panicles of three to ten flowers. The flowers have a sweet, heady aroma that can be smelled from a distance.

Loquat fruits, growing in clusters, are oval, rounded or pear-shaped, 3–5 centimetres (1–2 in) long, with a smooth or downy, yellow or orange, sometimes red-blushed skin. The succulent, tangy flesh is white, yellow or orange and sweet to subacid or acid, depending on the cultivar.

Each fruit contains from one to ten ovules, with three to five being most common. A variable number of the ovules mature into large brown seeds (with different numbers of seeds appearing in each fruit on the same tree, usually between one and four). The skin, though thin, can be peeled off manually if the fruit is ripe. In Egypt, varieties with sweeter fruits and fewer seeds are often grafted on inferior quality specimens.

The fruits are the sweetest when soft and orange. The flavour is a mixture of peach, citrus and mild mango.

History

The loquat is originally from China (the Chinese name is pipa, cognate with the pipa instrument) where related species can be found growing in the wild. It was introduced into Japan and became naturalised there in very early times; it has been cultivated there for over 1,000 years. It has also become naturalised in Georgia, Armenia, Afghanistan, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bermuda, Chile, Kenya, India, Iran, Iraq, South Africa, the whole Mediterranean Basin, Pakistan, New Zealand, Réunion, Tonga, Central America, Mexico, South America and in warmer parts of the United States (Hawaii, California, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina). Chinese immigrants are presumed to have carried the loquat to Hawaii. It has been cultivated in Japan for about 1,000 years and presumably the fruits and seeds were brought back from China to Japan by the many Japanese scholars visiting and studying in China during the Tang Dynasty.

Cultivation

Over 800 loquat cultivars exist in Asia. Self-fertile variants include the 'Gold Nugget' and 'Mogi' cultivars. The loquat is easy to grow in subtropical to mild temperate climates where it is often primarily grown as an ornamental plant, especially for its sweet-scented flowers, and secondarily for its delicious fruit. The boldly textured foliage adds a tropical look to gardens, contrasting well with many other plants. It is popular in the American South.

There are many named cultivars, with orange or white flesh. Some cultivars are intended for home-growing, where the flowers open gradually, and thus the fruit also ripens gradually, compared to the commercially grown species where the flowers open almost simultaneously, and the whole tree's fruit also ripens together.

Japan is the leading producer of loquats followed by Israel and then Brazil. In Europe, Spain is the main producer of loquat.

In temperate climates it is grown as an ornamental with winter protection, as the fruits seldom ripen to an edible state. In the highland parts of Central America, the loquat has become naturalized, and is often found growing wild in areas that have been disturbed but abandoned, its seeds having been dispersed by birds. Below 1000 meters, the fruit remains inedible for its high acidity, but above it, the wild fruit is appreciated and much harvested for its sweet, fruity flavor. It is occasionally planted for living fenceposts, as the tree is long-lived, not much subject to disease, and the wood is hard and durable. Good quality logs are much sought-after by furniture makers in Central America, who prize its hardness and durability

Culinary use

The loquat has a high sugar, acid, and pectin content. It is eaten as a fresh fruit and mixes well with other fruits in fresh fruit salads or fruit cups. The fruits are also commonly used to make jam, jelly, and chutney, and are often served poached in light syrup. Firm, slightly immature fruits are best for making pies or tarts.

Alcoholic beverages

Loquats can also be used to make light wine. It is fermented into a fruit wine, sometimes using just the crystal sugar and white liquor.

In Italy nespolino liqueur is made from the seeds, reminiscent of nocino and amaretto, both prepared from nuts and apricot kernels

Like most related plants, the seeds (pips) and young leaves of the plant are slightly poisonous.

Medicinal

Loquat syrup is used in Chinese medicine for soothing the throat and is a popular ingredient for cough drops. The leaves, combined with other ingredients and known as pipa gao(枇杷膏; pinyin: pípá gāo; literally "loquat paste"), it acts as a demulcent and an expectorant, as well as to soothe the digestive and respiratory systems.

In Japan, loquat leaves are dried to make a mild beverage known as biwa cha by brewing them using the traditional Japanese method. Biwa cha is held to beautify skin and heal inflammatory skin conditions such as psoriasis and eczema and to heal chronic respiratory conditions such as bronchitis. Eaten in quantity, loquats have a gentle but noticeable sedative effect, lasting up to 24 hours.



Eriobotrya japonica

Eriobotrya japonica è un albero da frutto appartenente alla famiglia delle *Rosacee* e al genere *Eriobotrya*, coltivata a scopo ornamentale e per il suo frutto conosciuto prevalentemente con il nome vernacolare di Nespolo del Giappone. Non va confuso con la nespola comune o germanica, di più antica coltivazione in Europa, che è invece il frutto di un'altra *Rosacea*, botanicamente nota come nespolo comune, *Mespilus germanica*, oggi raramente coltivato e commercializzato.

Origine

Si ritiene che il nespolo del Giappone sia originario della Cina, dove il frutto prende il nome di *pipa* o *pipa guo*, cioè frutto del pipa, in riferimento allo strumento musicale tradizionale di cui ricorda la forma. In giapponese il frutto è chiamato biwa ed è qui che ha ricevuto la maggior attenzione colturale già in epoca precedente al contatto con l'Europa, con la selezione di diverse varietà che sono di norma a frutto più grande di quelle selvatiche cinesi. Il frutto iniziò la diffusione in Europa all'inizio del 1800, il primo esemplare infatti fu impiantato nel giardino Botanico di Parigi nel 1784, ed in seguito, ai Kew Gardens di Londra nel 1787.

Descrizione

Il nespolo del Giappone è un albero di medie dimensioni, fino ad 8-10 metri di altezza ed altrettanto in larghezza, che normalmente è coltivato a dimensioni più modeste. L'albero è latifoglie e sempreverde, le foglie sono molto grandi (lunghezza fino a 25 cm, larghezza fino 10 cm), di consistenza molto robusta, simile al cartone, con superficie dorsale colore verde carico,

lucide, mentre al verso sono colore verde pallido, biancastro e fortemente pelose. La pelosità riguarda tutte le parti giovani e non lignificate della pianta.

I frutti del nespolo del Giappone sono delle drupe di colore giallastro chiaro, giallo o arancione, e sono immediatamente eduli. Essi contengono uno, due tre o quattro grossi semiche sono in peso una parte considerevole del frutto. la maturazione avviene in maggio-giugno, mentre la fioritura si ha in dicembre-gennaio.

Coltivazione

la fioritura essendo in inverno, perciò la produzione si ha solo nel sud Italia (e in Liguria) , con clima mite dove le api possono impollinare, anche se l'albero resiste al freddo ed è coltivato anche al nord, come il corbezzolo. Addirittura nelle Filippine i nespoli del Giappone sono coltivati a bassa siepe, (non più di 2 metri di altezza) per evitare i danni recati dai tifoni; essendo infatti una pianta sempreverde con foglie grandi e rigide è soggetta a danni se sottoposta a venti violenti, o al carico della neve in climi rigidi.

Per la riproduzione per seme, i semi devono essere immediatamente seminati, dato che perdono rapidamente la propria germinabilità, disidratandosi. Con i semi è possibile fare un liquore analogo al nocino, il nespolino. I semi del nespolo del Giappone contengono comunque piccole quantità di acido cianidrico (cianuro). i frutti sono dissetanti e rinfrescanti.

Altri usi

questa è una pianta mellifera, e si può produrre del miele, ma si ha solo in zone del meridione dove la fioritura è consentita dal clima mite, essendo a dicembre-gennaio e inoltre le api devono avere temperature non troppo rigide che permette di uscire e bottinare durante la fioritura. I fiori di nespolo del Giappone sono molto profumati, il profumo è simile a quello del biancospino; i fiori sono molto ricercati dalle api che cercano nettare e polline fresco, dato che durante il periodo di fioritura del nespolo del Giappone, per soddisfare le poche api o i bombi circolanti ci sono pochissimi fiori. Inoltre è utilizzata come albero ornamentale in giardini e parchi.