

## Plants That Produce SAPOTE-NAMED FRUITING PLANTS

By Richard Frost

The word *Sapote* is derived from the Nahuatl (Aztec) language word *Tzapotl* for a soft, edible fruit. Traditionally it was applied to several fruits of the Americas, such as: "black tzapotl", "green tzapotl", and "white tzapotl". Beginning with the European incursion in the 1500's, the word tzapotl was latinized into zapotl, zapota, sapota, zapote, and sapote – the latter gaining much use in English. Since that time these words have also been used to describe fruits and plants of other, mainly tropical regions. It is also occasionally confused with "Zapotec" – the pre-Aztec peoples of Oaxaca, Mexico. Several plants also bear this name, such as Zapotec Tomato and Zapoteca Stickpea.

Today there are about two dozen fruiting plants which incorporate *sapote* into their common or taxonomic name. I have adopted the following rating system for the fruits of these plants:

- ☺ = excellent eaten fresh, or when prepared with other food, baked, etc.
- 😊 = o.k. when eaten fresh, but much better when prepared or cooked
- ☹ = extremely poor taste or characteristic, such as gluing your mouth together
- ☠ = a serious toxin or carcinogen

With this rating system in mind, let's look at some of these fruits and see which you recognize and what surprises might be in store.

- ☺ Wild Sapote Tree (*Madhuca longifolia*), The Indian Butter Tree.
- ☺ Sapote (*Manilkara zapota*), named Sapodilla by the Dutch.
- ☺ Zapote Mamey (*Pouteria sapota*), aka Mamey Colorado.
- ☺ Green Sapote (*Pouteria viridis*), tolerates San Diego coastal regions with warm summers.
- ☺ White Sapote (*Casimiroa edulis*; syn. *C. sapota*), cultivars McDill and Golden are excellent for San Diego. Warning: no plant produces more fruit per square foot than the White Sapote!
- ☺ Zapote de Santo Domingo (*Mammea americana*), aka Mammee Apple.
- ☺ Melón Zapote (*Carica papaya*), Common yellow- and red-fleshed papayas.
- ☹ Black Sapote (*Diospyros digyna*), a member of the persimmon family that tolerates San Diego climates.
- ☹ Yellow Sapote (*Pouteria campechiana*), often called Canistel or Eggfruit – can be grown in San Diego with proper care.
- ☹ Zapote Bobo (*Pachira aquatica*), sold as a braided houseplant and called 'Money Tree'. Outdoors in San Diego it grows like ornamental Ficus and produces potato-sized chestnuts!
- ☹ Sapote de Perro (*Morisonia americana*), aka Pachaca.
- ☹ Zapote Faisán (*Sideroxylon stevensonii*), the latex content will glue your mouth together.
- ☠ Zapote Negro (*Diospyros revoluta*), aka Black Apple – deadly to confuse with Black Sapote.
- ☠ Sapote of India (*Parkia timoriana*), aka Yongchak. #1 cause of throat cancer in Thailand.
- ☠ Sapote Agrio (*Annona muricata*), aka Graviola, Guanábana, Guyabano, Soursop, and Zapote. Each fruit (or 12 oz. of the popular drink) contains about 35 mg of Annonacin compounds. Consuming on average 25 mg or more per day on a weekly or monthly basis for a period of a few years or more causes significant destruction of brain cells and a permanent dementia condition. Some natives to the island of Guadalupe who have eaten the fruit on a daily basis for over two decades have become completely dysfunctional. Persons voluntarily taking the herbal supplement Graviola (600 mg Annonacins) on a daily basis for cancer prevention are at serious risk. The popular fruit 'Cherimoya' (*Annona cherimola*) is a very close relative of Graviola and considered by some neurologists to contain the same quantities of Annonacins.

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