



Grown in Asia: Lesser Known Crops of Significance

Marian Plum

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When ripe, the yellow and apricot-colored fruit of the marian plum (*Bouea macrophylla* Griff.) seem to glow among the tree's glossy green leaves. The ripe fruit of marian plum offers an edible, crisp skin and juicy flesh. Besides being eaten raw as a dessert fruit, marian plum is also cooked, preserved and included as an ingredient in chili paste condiments. Like mango, young leaf shoots are also consumed.

The marian plum is native to peninsular Malaysia, north Sumatra and parts of Java. According to the World Agroforestry Centre, the species is known as *gandaria* in the Philippines and Indonesia and *rembunia* in Malaysia. In Thailand it is called *maprang*. Being a member of the Anacardiaceae family, the appearance and flavor of marian plum is quite similar to mango.



Marian plum is generally grown from seed. However, to maintain characteristics of desired varieties seedlings can be easily propagated by marcotting or grafting. The plant thrives in light, fertile soil. Vegetatively propagated trees may bear fruit after 5-6 years, while seed-grown trees may fruit within 8-10 years (ICRAF).

In Indonesia, marian plum trees flower between June and November and fruit from March to June. However, in Thailand, flowering occurs in November and December with fruiting between March and May (FAO).

Varieties are basically divided between sweet and sour types; the sweeter selections have been developed for the market. Older, less sweet varieties are sometimes described as having a slight "turpentine" taste. Another Thai type of marian plum, known as *mayong*, is similar to the sweet varieties but with a degree of sourness in the ripe fruit.

Marian plum is often planted as both a fruit and shade tree in home gardens. But the FAO reports that in the early 1990s, commercial development of marian plum could be found in several provinces in Thailand, with an average productivity of 7 metric tons per hectare. Sold in village market stalls as well as supermarkets, the Thai government is also reportedly promoting marian plum exports.

Widely cultivated and appreciated wherever it is grown, marian plum seems poised to gain a higher profile in Southeast Asia.

References

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