

DRAGON FRUIT

A few weeks ago while at our local green grocer we spied a new fruit call Dragon Fruit which looked very different and interesting.

We purchased one of the fruits to try it out and find out more about where it comes from and what benefits it may have health wise.

My partner did a bit of research on her Face Book and found that several people in the Philippines were cultivating the fruit for health and income.

The ones that we saw were imported from Thailand (I think) and selling for between \$5 to \$8.00 each.

Since then we have seen Dragon Fruit in Supermarkets so they must be fairly readily available over most of New Zealand.

Dragon fruit are the seed pods of a cacti family which there are 3 species:

Hylocereus undatus (Pitaya blanca or White-fleshed Pitaya) has red-skinned fruit with white flesh. This is the most commonly seen "dragon fruit".

Hylocereus costaricensis (Pitaya roja or Red-fleshed Pitaya, also known as *Hylocereus polyrhizus*) has red-skinned fruit with red flesh.

Hylocereus megalanthus (Pitaya amarilla or Yellow Pitaya, also known as *Selenicereus megalanthus*) has yellow-skinned fruit with white flesh.

The fruit can weigh from 150 to 600 grams; some may reach one kilogram.

Dragon fruit is a hemi-epiphytic cactus which makes it very suitable to grow in a hanging pot.

Similar to what we know as the Christmas Cacti (botanically known as *Schlumbergera* or *Zygocactus*)

Once I realised it was the fruit of a cacti which when cut open reveals hundreds of tiny seeds.

I knew it would be no problem growing them.

My early days of having a nursery was specialising in growing cacti and succulents from either seed or offsets so I know how easy it is to germinate and grow many types of cacti from seed.

A search on the internet showed amazingly beautiful flowers of the Dragon Fruit Cacti which makes another very good reason to grow them.

If you would like to grow some of this healthy fruit then firstly purchase a Dragon Fruit and scoop out some of the many seeds and pulp. Place on a paper towel or similar and leave to dry.

A few weeks later place purchased compost into a seedling punnet and lay the paper towel over the

compost. Spray the seeds and towel with MBL diluted to 20mls per litre then cover with sand.

Place on a shelf in a glasshouse or on a sunny window sill and moisten the sand by misting regularly.

It should only take a week or two to see that some of the seeds have germinated. Then if on a window sill you will need to move the punnet outside to prevent stretching and dampening off.

Placed in a light situation inside a deeper tray with a sheet of glass over would be suitable.

When the baby cacti get a few inches long they can be pricked out and placed into small pots to grow on. Use compost and either Matrix or my Secret Tomato Food for growth.

During summer they can grow quickly into a nice size for potting into a big hanging basket.

Hang in a glasshouse or on a sunny sheltered porch where with food and sun they will flower and later produce the Dragon Fruit which has a bland to sweet tasting pulp..

The amount of vitamin C in dragon fruit is high, and because it is a natural fruit it provides you with a rich balance of nutrients coming along with the vitamin C.

Dragon fruit is a good natural source of anti-oxidants which help to prevent the dangers of free radicals that can cause cancer and other health problems.

Dragon fruit has lots of dietary fiber with almost 1g of fiber per 100g of the fresh dragon fruit.

Heart; this fruit has an amazing superpower that helps decrease bad cholesterol levels and replenish good levels. Dragon fruit is an excellent source of monounsaturated fats, helping the heart stay in great condition.

Fiber; They have a high fiber content, which can assist with poor digestion and constipation. Eating the flesh and seeds, which contain good protein, will keep your body fortified and satisfied.

Antioxidants; To rid the body of free radicals and cancer-producing properties, you can eat foods that contain antioxidants.

Diabetes; The high amount of fiber in dragon fruit can ultimately help regulate diabetes, as it can stabilize blood sugar levels by suppressing sugar spikes.

Reduces Signs of Aging; Eating a dragon fruit with its rich antioxidants can keep the skin tight and young. You can even make a face mask using the fruit combined with honey as a natural alternative to anti-aging masks.

Suppresses Arthritis; Arthritis directly affects the joints and causes severe irritation and immobility. Adding dragon fruit to your diet can help you fight these ailments. Dragon fruit's benefits for people suffering from arthritis are so great that it's commonly referred to as the "anti-inflammatory fruit." Avoiding Acne; this treatment is not just for teenagers. Rich in vitamin C, this fruit becomes a great topical ointment. Turn a slice of dragon fruit into a paste and apply it to your reddened areas on your face or skin, then rinse with water. For best results, use twice daily.

Great flowers, healthy fruit all for the small price of a fruit to get started and growing.

An alert for gardeners: MPI was informed on Thursday 6 November 2014 that an observant home gardener in Temuka had found an unusual stink bug in his garden. He provided a photograph and the bug was tentatively identified by MPI as a yellow spotted stink bug (YSSB). The specimen was collected on Saturday 8 November 2014 and the identification confirmed as an unmated female YSSB (*Erthesina fullo*).

We are taking this find seriously. A key aim of the response is to determine presence/absence of a population. We are really pleased that the householder did the right thing and notified that he had found the bug. The householder has also carried out repeated inspections of his property and found no other similar bugs.

As a precaution we are stepping up awareness about this bug. We will be asking the local community to help out by keeping an eye out for any more of these bugs and to call our Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline (0800 80 99 66) if they spot anything. A communications plan is being implemented.