

## Snowbird Harvest

If you're only here for the season you can still grow and enjoy great fruits

By DOUG CALDWELL (Contact)

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Left: There are more than 200 varieties of delicious mango (*Mangifera indica*) growing in Florida, but few that can be harvested during the tourist season. File

Right: The sapodilla (*Manilkara zapota*) makes a sturdy ornamental tree with fruit that tastes like "creamy brown sugar, luscious pear, scented with jasmine," according to Charles Boning, author of "Florida's Best Fruiting Plants." Doug Caldwell



Left: The grumichama (*Eugenia brasilinesis*) ripens in April and May and is an attractive, shiny-leaved ornamental with delicious fruit resembling bing cherries. Courtesy [www.toptropicals.com](http://www.toptropicals.com)

I had a call requesting a mango variety that would ripen during the time frame the snowbirds are in town, say October through May. Mangos, ah, *Mangifera indica*, one of the royal tropical fruits! There are many more than 200 cultivars present in gardens such as Fairchild in Miami and Fruit and Spice Park in Homestead. However, it is one which is almost totally a don't-plant fruit for snowbirds who want a harvest.

My investigation led me to call a number of experts, including David and Jenny Burd in Naples, Chris Rollins at Fruit and Spice Park in Homestead and retired University of Florida professor Gene Joyner with his Unbelievable Acres Botanic Gardens in West Palm Beach.

Typically mangos ripen from June through August. Early arriving snowbirds may try the tangy, honey-flavored, late ripening 'Keitt' (pronounced kit). It ripens from August to early October.

Another late variety is an old timer, 'Brooks Late'. And 'Chok Anon' will bear fruit late, into November according to Richard Campbell, Ph.D., the mango curator with Fairchild Tropical Gardens. If you are arriving in early October, you may want to have neighbors collect the fruit a few weeks ahead of time, before the furry or feathered critters or landscapers and others who know you are out of town take the load off the branches for you. One hates to see mangos go to waste.

Mango possibilities for early ripening, before the crowd leaves in May, include: 'Earlygold', 'Rosigold' (April and early May) and 'Edward'. The last one ripens in late May through July, and many regard it as one of the finest flavored mangos. David Burd stated that 'Rosigold' was very consistent bearing in May

### **Taming that tree**

However, mango trees can overwhelm a yard if not kept pruned back to a comfortable, reach-and-grab height, with some varieties exceeding 60 feet in height and 100 feet in width. Naples grower David Burd maintains that mango trees will tolerate being kept short. But some are rapid growers and others tend to keep a short profile, hence less severe pruning -- and work! -- is required.

Such is 'Rosigold'; it is a small tree, manageable and highly productive. It can be kept at 8 feet in height and spread. Blooming often occurs in successive waves throughout the winter, resulting in a multiple harvests. The 'Rosigold' flavor, is described by Richard Campbell, as "rich, aromatic, and sweet, with a hint of the Asian Tropics."

Do your homework and see if there are references to taste and stringiness or fiber content. Some of the original varieties are so stringy, biting into one is like flossing six of your teeth at once. Just when you were expecting desert?

Remember, mangos are frost-sensitive. Temperatures of 26 to 28 degrees F. may kill younger trees. Also, mangos are related to poison ivy. If you have never tested this, go slowly with handling plant parts: the resin from stems, fruit -- especially the skin of green mangos -- have caused blistering on sensitive people. In extreme, rare cases, volatiles from the flowers may cause allergic reactions such as eyelid and facial swelling and respiratory difficulties if prolonged exposure occurs.

Simply washing after handling plant parts will eliminate problems for most people. Don't pig out on peck of mangos, if it is your first tasting experience.

Pest problems don't require constant vigilance, but be alert for: mites, scales, thrips and powdery mildew, which can destroy flower panicles and cause a crop failure. See, more on pests and how to grow mangos at: [edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG216](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG216)

### **Alternative seasonal fruits**

Citrus, of course, ripens November through May, perfect timing for snow birds. But with the fatal citrus greening disease established in Collier County, it may be a gamble as to how long citrus will be sustainable. You may want to explore some other fruit for fun.

Other species which bear during "season" include:

- \* avocados
- \* carambola (star fruit)
- \* loquat (fruit flies will be a problem)
- \* sapodilla (one of my favorites)
- \* papaya (fruit flies can be a problem here, too)
- \* jaboticoba; a nice ornamental (pronounced JAW-BOH-ti-CAH-buh)
- \* grumichama (ornamental and a personal favorite, pronounced ).

Find University of Florida fact sheets on many exotic types of fruit at: [trec.ifas.ufl.edu/fruitscapes](http://trec.ifas.ufl.edu/fruitscapes)

Do your homework and then plant several trees. Three events are coming up which will provide excellent opportunities for you to buy fruit trees that are not always readily available, see the calendar events that accompany this story.

#### **ECHO Farm Day and tree sale**

When: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. **March 14**

Where: 17391 Durrance Road North Fort Myers

Information: [echonet.org](http://echonet.org)

#### **Collier Fruit Growers tree sale**

When: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. **March 21**

Where: North Goodlette Farmers' Market at North Naples United Methodist Church, 6000 Goodlette Road N, Naples; note that this is a new location

Information: 601-2919

#### **Bonita Springs Tropical Fruit Club**

Spring fruit tree sale

When: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. **March 7**

Where: Riverside Park, Old 41,

Downtown Bonita Springs

Information: 992-4664

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