

# The East London Garden Society

## Plant Facts

### Jackfruit



The word 'jackfruit' comes from Portuguese *jaca*, which in turn is derived from the Malayalam language term *chakka*. When the Portuguese arrived in India at Kozhikode on the Malabar Coast in 1498, the Malayalam name *chakka* was recorded by Hendrik van Rheedee (1678 - 1703).

The common English name 'jackfruit' was used by physician and naturalist Garcia de Orta in

his 1563 book *Colóquios dos simples e drogas da India*. Centuries later, botanist Ralph Randles Stewart suggested it was named after William Jack (1795 - 1822), a Scottish botanist who worked for the East India Company in Bengal, Sumatra and Malaysia.

The jackfruit has played a significant role in Indian agriculture for centuries. Archaeological findings in India have revealed that jackfruit was cultivated in India 3000 to 6000 years ago. It has also been widely cultivated in southeast Asia. The jackfruit also provides a potential solution to countries facing problems of food shortage, such as in several countries of Africa.

When taking care of the plant, minimal pruning is required and cutting off dead branches from the interior of the tree is only sometimes needed. In addition, twigs bearing fruit must be twisted or cut down to the trunk to induce growth for the next season, branches may also be cut off every three to four years to maintain its productivity.

Jackfruit is related to breadfruit, which is hailed as a *miracle* crop that could help feed the world and tastes like pulled pork. Being common and relatively inexpensive in the Philippines, Jamaica, Southeast Asia, Brazil and other tropical climates, it's beginning to show more often in American grocery stores. A single fruit can weigh from 10 to 100 pounds, with skin that's either a tightly packed network of spiny knobs or a flattened surface more like that of a grapefruit.

Jackfruit grows on trees as high as 50 feet, making them the largest fruit tree in the world and the trees are perennial, so replanting isn't necessary. Two growing seasons annually produce 150 to 250 jackfruits per tree which is a lot of food considering how large they are.

Whilst some might think that jackfruit is a *throwaway* fruit because there are so many other delicious fruits such as bananas, watermelon, apples and strawberries abundantly available in every grocery store, this jumbo fruit is much more than it first appears, as it could save millions of people from

starvation. It can provide many nutrients and calories so if you eat ten or twelve bulbs of this fruit, you don't need food for another half day.

Waiting until they drop from the trees renders them too ripe to eat so they need to be picked for optimal quality. In fact, unripe fruit exceeds the quality of those that are over-ripe. Exuding a strong, sweet, fruity scent, a jackfruit is dense and milky white when you cut into it, with the outside lining containing hundreds of fleshy bulbs or lobes, containing highly nutritious seeds. As well as eating the bulbs as a fruit, jackfruits can be used in jams, juices and ice cream or added to soups. The fruit can be roasted, dried and ground to make jackfruit curry or stir fry, as well as fruit dishes.

After cooking for an hour, un-ripened jackfruit provides the flavour and texture of pulled pork and is becoming popular in vegan and vegetarian circles as a meat substitute but after harvesting, jackfruit won't last more than a few weeks. Jackfruit peel has been quoted in studies for its ability to remove the heavy metal cadmium, a known human carcinogen, also providing 25 percent of the pyridoxine, or vitamin B6, you need in a single day.

Jackfruits also have high amounts of niacin, riboflavin, folic acid, calcium, iron, manganese and magnesium and potassium, with the latter important for optimum function of cell and body fluids to help control your heart rate and blood pressure.

Jackfruit is a nutritional boon to people in Vietnam, Malaysia and Bangladesh, where it's the national fruit and second only to the mango in importance. Jackfruit is so important in Bangladesh that if there's room, everyone grows them, not only to feed people, but for other uses such as feeding goats and other farm animals, using the orange bark to dye traditional robes worn by monks, producing a latex-like substance that can substitute for glue, and using the wood from the gigantic trees as lumber.

As a food, a lot of jackfruit grown in India goes to waste, often due to spoilage, because it is thought to be a food for *poor* people, so there is a tendency to avoid eating it.