



Harvest of the Month

Kiwifruit



Social Sciences

The kiwifruit is native to central and eastern China, where it was first known as “yang tao” and began to be cultivated for medicinal purposes. It was later called “Chinese gooseberry” before commercial growers in New Zealand decided to name it after their national bird, since both the fruit and the bird were small, brown and fuzzy! Kiwi fruit became popular with British and American servicemen stationed in New Zealand during World War II, and later became commonly exported, first to Great Britain and then to California in the 1960s. It has been grown commercially for less than 100 years, so it makes sense that it is still most commonly grown in China and New Zealand. In the United States, California is the top kiwi producer.



Botany

There are many species of kiwi in the genus *Actinidia*. The most common is the variety Hayward (*Actinidia deliciosa*). This is the common brown fuzzy kiwi with green flesh. Another species, *Actinidia chinensis*, is gaining popularity. It has less fuzzy skin and yellow or pale green flesh. All kiwi plants are woody vines that grow quickly, so annual pruning and sturdy trellises are a must. Kiwi plants are dioecious, which means the male and female flowers are borne on separate plants! This means that in order to have fruit you must have two kiwi plants, a male and at least one female.

Kiwi has the same name in Spanish and English.



Nutrition

Kiwis are a very nutrient dense fruit. They have high amounts of Vitamin C and K, potassium, and the antioxidant lutein. Historically kiwis have been used medicinally to treat digestive problems.

Growing Tips



Kiwi plants grow very well in Sonoma County. If you have the space for them, they make an excellent crop for

school gardens as they are highly productive during the school year; the harvest period is late Fall and Winter. Kiwi plants are vigorous growers and the vines can get quite large, so be sure to have a large, sturdy trellis erected before planting. Also, for fruit production, make sure you plant both a male and a female plant. If you have the space for more plants, one male plant is enough to fertilize up to eight female plants.

Care and Maintenance

Kiwi plants need fertile soil and regular irrigation in order to flower and fruit. They are not a low-water use plant. They also need a sturdy trellis and regular pruning. Plants are pruned back significantly during the late Winter dormant period. They can also be Summer pruned to open up the plant for better airflow and to decrease extremely heavy fruit loads.

Harvesting

Kiwis are not particular about when they are harvested. They can be harvested when still quite firm and they will ripen off the tree. If you have access to refrigeration they will store for 2-3 months and can be pulled out to ripen at room temperature as needed. They can also be left to ripen on the vine, and harvested as there is time or interest. Keep a knife or pair of pruners handy to cut them open for the kids and enjoy a vitamin-packed Winter snack straight out of the garden!

