

Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) - Lythraceae family

Spanish: *Granada*

O'odham: *Galna:yo*



POMEGRANATES IN BLOOM AT THE ENTRANCE TO MISSION GARDEN

In Mission Garden

Pomegranate trees are the first thing you see when you walk through the gate. They are the first trees to leaf out at the end of our short winters, and by May they are donning showy red blossoms. In high summer the branches are bowing down laden with fruit, and in fall their bright yellow foliage affords the most brilliant splashes of color. We have 45 pomegranate trees, with 11 different cultivars.





ARBORIST LIBBY DAVISON PLANTING ONE OF THE FIRST POMEGRANATE TREES IN THE GARDEN, MARCH 2012

Pomegranates were among the first trees planted in the Spanish orchard in the spring of 2012. Now you can find them lining the Spanish fields, as well as in the O'odham Post-Contact Garden and the Mexican Garden.

In Your Garden

Pomegranate trees are actually shrubs. They can be pruned to form a single, or multiple stemmed tree but they will inevitably send out abundant water sprouts, and their flexible boughs will bend down to the ground, as bushiness is their true nature. Pomegranates tolerate extreme heat, drought, alkaline soils, moderate frosts and an inordinate amount of neglect. However, for good fruit production in the Sonoran Desert they require consistent and abundant irrigation.



POMEGRANATES BLOOM IN APRIL





LEAF-FOOTED BUGS PIERCE POMEGRANATES WITH THEIR PROBOSCIS TO FEED ON JUICES

The most common pest is the leaf-footed bug (*Leptoglossus phyllopus*), which has infested the orchard and spoiled significant portions of our crops. We refrain from using pesticides, but we have tried applying neem oil defoliated trees in the winter, and even using a shop vacuum to suck the bugs off our fruit! These methods did little to lessen their numbers. Nonetheless, their natural predators, including assassin bugs, spiders and birds, seem to be increasingly keeping their numbers in check. It's important to remove cracked and damaged fruit from the tree and ground, as the nymphs thrive inside them.



Harvest



SONORAN WHITE POMEGRANATES ARE RIPE FOR PICKING IN LATE SUMMER

The Sosa-Carrillo, Josefina and Quitobaquito cultivars are ripe for harvest from August to September. The fruit that has not been damaged by the leaf-footed bug can remain ripe on the tree for months. When harvested whole fruits can also be kept at room temperature for weeks. The rinds will harden but the insides stay juicy.

Pomegranate arils, the flesh around the seeds, are most commonly eaten fresh, right off the tree. It is best to slice off the top and the bottom, then score the outer skin along the inner membranes and break open the entire fruit like the petals of a flower. This way the bitter membranes between the sections of arils can be easily removed. Pomegranates can also be squeezed for juice.



POMEGRANATES ARE TRADITIONALLY TIED UP IN STRINGS AND HUNG IN THE KITCHEN FOR STORAGE



Agua de Granada is a popular local drink wherein pomegranate arils and juice are used to flavor cold water. Arils are also added to salads, salsas and stews. The dried rinds are used medicinally for many purposes, including sore throats, heart and bone health, and as sunscreen.

Origins

Originating in northern Persia, pomegranates were domesticated some 6000 years ago. Many local specimens are believed to be clones of the trees European missionaries first introduced into the Pimería Alta during the early 18th century. The whitish color of the arils may be an adaptation to the extreme heat of the Sonoran Desert. Through efforts such as the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum's Kino Heritage Fruit Trees Project, and Mission Garden's collaboration

with Ajo Sustainable Agriculture to celebrate an annual Baja Arizona Pomegranate Festival, local pomegranate cultivars are gaining notoriety as Sonoran White Pomegranates.



MOST HEIRLOOM CULTIVARS HAVE SWEET SOFT-SEEDED WHITE ARILS



Cultivars in Mission Garden



THE ARRAY OF 11 DIFFERENT POMEGRANATE CULTIVARS IN MISSION GARDEN

Sonoran White: These cultivars have golden skin and sweet, soft-seeded, yellowish arils that tinge pink late in the season. They ripen in August and September.

Sosa-Carillo: Collected at historic Sosa-Carrillo house in downtown Tucson.

Josefina: Collected at home of Mission Garden 'Madrina' Josefina Lizárraga.

Quitobaquito: Collected from last remaining tree in old orchard of disappeared O'odham village in what is now Organ Pipe National Monument. Reddish around crown.

San Ignacio Agosteo: Collected in Casimiro Sanchez' orchard, San Ignacio, Sonora.

Tumacacori Pink: Collected at Tumacacori National Historic Park, Visitor's Center. Reddish around crown.

San Isidro Agosteo: Collected from Don Pedro Muñoz orchard, Magdalena, Sonora.

Ruby: Collected in the California Gulch wash, near Ruby, Arizona. Sweet, very soft-seeded, pink arils. Ripens early fall.

Tumacacori Ranch House: Collected at Tumacacori National Historic Park. Tart, hard-seeded, red arils. Ripens in October.

Verde River: Collected in the floodplain of the Verde River by Ray Leimkuehler, horticulturist at Desert Botanical Garden. Tart, hard-seeded, red arils. Ripens in October.

Tumacacori Ornamental: Collected at Tumacacori National Historic Park, courtyard. Large white and orangish red carnation-like blossoms. Non-fruiting.



Quote

Kino Heritage Fruit Trees director Jesús García's father used to say: "*En un cuarto oscuro, cadernales vide entrar, todos con gran apetito y cada quien en su lugar.*" (In a dark chamber, I saw cardinals enter, all with a big appetite and each one in his place.)

Further Reading

Jesús García, Kino Heritage Fruit Trees Project; Dena Cowan, "Sonoran White Pomegranate," *Edible Baja Arizona* July 2016; *The Origins of Fruit & Vegetables*, Jonathan Roberts, 2001; *Gardens of New Spain*, William Dunmire.



RUBY POMEGRANATE

