

Tamarillos - harvest and post-harvest

Tamarillo harvest is quite labour intensive because it is done by hand. The time that you harvest and how you pack and store your crop depends on the quality of fruit you want and how long you need to store it. Therefore, the harvest needs to be carefully planned. Talk to the people you plan to sell to about what they require for quality and packaging.

Harvest

Depending on variety and on how you have pruned your crop, tamarillos will be ready for harvest from March or April. Not all the fruit ripens at the same time, and the season may continue as late as early December for late maturing crops. Tamarillos are harvested by hand.

The fruit is ripe enough to be picked when the whole fruit is coloured (red or gold, depending on variety). This is the best time to harvest if you need to store the fruit for a long time (up to eight weeks). If there is still a ring of green around the top of the fruit it will not ripen to eating quality after picking.

However, if you are not planning on to store the fruit for a long time (a couple of weeks or less) the fruit should be picked only once the stalk and calyx turn pale green or even slightly yellow. This ensures that the fruit will reach the consumer almost ripe enough to eat.

Post harvest handling and packaging

Fruit should be graded to ensure it is reasonably free of blemishes, cuts and bruises. It should also be free of pests and diseases.

There are a number of ways to pack tamarillos. They are often packed into plastic trays with pockets for the fruit molded into them, then put into wooden or cardboard packages in single or multiple layers.

However you choose to pack your fruit, the important thing is to protect them from damage

during storage and transport. Ask the people you supply about their expectations for quality and packaging.



Tamarillos packed for export in plastic trays with molded pockets.

<http://www.tamarillo.com/Tamarillo/servlet>

Storage

Tamarillos should be stored between 3.5°C and 4.5°C. At lower temperatures the fruit can get a "freezer burn" and at higher temperatures they are more likely to get fungal rots.

One method for controlling rot is a hot water dip, but this also removes the natural waxes from the fruit's surface. This needs to be replaced with another coating using a suitable wax.

Storing tamarillos with other fruit may shorten their storage life. This is probably because the other fruits produce ethylene gas which causes the tamarillos to ripen early.

'Te Pānui Tips' are simple fact sheets that cover topics designing organic crop production systems on the East Coast.

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