

An introduction to tamarillos

Tamarillos (also called tree tomatoes) are a subtropical tree native to South America. Different varieties have fruit with different colours and flavours, with red fruit varieties being the most commonly grown.

Tamarillos have fast fruit development, a long harvest season and are relatively easy to maintain and pick. Their yield is lower than some crops but this is balanced by low costs of establishing and maintaining the crop.

Tamarillos

Tamarillos share some common characteristics with passionfruit and the factors important for site selection are similar.

Tamarillos are subtropical plants and are very susceptible to frosts and cold damage. They need to grow in areas where frosts are infrequent and not severe. They are quite brittle and susceptible to damage by wind, especially when they are bearing fruit. This means that tamarillos need to be protected by shelterbelts.

Like passionfruit, tamarillos don't like "wet feet" and need a free draining soil or they can be affected by root rot. However they have only got shallow roots so they also need regular watering in summer, through irrigation if necessary.

How are tamarillos grown?

Depending on how they are propagated (they can be grown from cuttings or seed) tamarillos grow as a more tree-like or more shrub-like plant. Tamarillos are usually planted in spring after frost danger has passed.

A plant spacing of about 1.5m within rows and 5m between rows is recommended. They are often planted on raised ground to keep the young plants from getting wet feet. Young tamarillos can be "trained" by pruning, to encourage them to branch at a low level.

Tamarillos produce fruit on that season's new growth. The first crop usually appears the second season after planting.



Tamarillo fruit

(<http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/tropical>)

Managing the crop

The lighter soils that tamarillos prefer may have nutrient leaching problems so the soil needs to be monitored for nutrient deficiency. Nitrogen, potassium and magnesium are considered particularly important for tamarillos and must be added if low.

Pruning is important to make sure that the plant bears fruit on strong branches. It also influences the size of the fruit that grow.

Tamarillos are susceptible to a number of diseases which can reduce yields or affect fruit quality. Pests such as aphids and whitefly are carriers of some of these diseases, although they can also be harboured in some weeds. It is important to control both pests and weeds to limit the development and spread of diseases among tamarillo plants.

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

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