

RAMBUTAN

The rambutan (*Nephelium lappaceum* L.) is an exotic fruit native of Malaysia, much cultivated in Asia and little known in Brazil, showing however a high market potential and growth, as occurred with the lychee, a fruit of the same family (*Sapindaceae*).

In 2010 the quantity of rambutan fruit sold in São Paulo General Warehousing and Centers Company (CEAGESP) was around 21.47 tons, the state of Bahia being responsible for the vast majority of fruit marketed during the months of February to August. The State of São Paulo provided fruits from September to January (months in which there is no crop in other states, demonstrating its potential), with higher crop in January (1.19 tons).

Rambutan fruit is generally consumed *in natura*, but can be used to make jellies, jams and its seeds can be roasted to become nuts. Consumers seek fruits of good appearance, size and color being important factors. The aryl (edible portion) must represent, therefore, a high proportion of the total weight of the fruit, be easily separated from the seed and have good aroma and texture.

Under appropriate conditions of cultivation without pruning, the plants reach a height of 12-20 m, the trunk diameter ranging from 40 to 60 cm; the leaves are petiolate, alternate and pinate with 2-4 pairs of folioles arranged either alternately or opposite on the rachis, their size ranging from 2 to 10.5 cm x 5-28 cm, the absence of a terminal leaflet being a characteristic of the genre; the inflorescences are erect, widely branched with many flowers, mainly in the extremity of the branches, although pseudo-terminal panicles may also occur; the flowers are either male (producing only stamens) or hermaphrodite (which can be basically female flowers, with small stamens, or male, with undeveloped stigmas); the fruits are produced in the terminal portion, in clusters with 10-13 units.

The climate and the environment play an important role in flowering and subsequent fruiting and therefore in production. In their natural environment, the emergence of the panicle occurs throughout the year, usually after a period of drought, being also related to low night temperature. In some regions there are two blooms per year, while in others there is only one flowering and yield per year.

There is a considerable genetic diversity in the rambutan, which favors the selection of varieties, the material being basically differentiated by the color of the fruits, which ranges from red to yellow, as well as the density and quality of the aryl.

The seedlings can be obtained by seeds, grafting and layering; seed propagation is the method most used by producers however the production occurs 8 to 10 years after planting and the plants show variability, whilst plants from vegetative propagation produce in 3-4 years and form uniform orchards, a highly desirable trait in crops.

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