
Will Carambola Trees Come True to Seed?

Carambola fruit, *Averrhoa carambola*, also known as “star fruit” has gone from an obscure, inexpensive fruit in the U.S. to an exceptionally expensive “yuppie” fruit. When sliced, the star shape makes it popular on top of fruit salads, added to stir-fried vegetables, dried, or as a decorative addition to desserts. Most people in southern Florida who have tasted the old dooryard seedling trees find the fruit too sour to be of interest. They are usually amazed to taste the new, sweet grafted varieties. Since carambola bears at a young age and produces one of the heaviest crops of any small tree over a long season, the good varieties are great dooryard trees.

We wondered what would happen if ECHO sent out seed taken from fruit of one of the superior trees. Would it give fruit just like the parent, or would the fruit be sour and unappealing? To find out, we planted seven seeds taken from the commercial yellow Florida variety ‘Arkin.’ The great variation in shape and flavor is such a good demonstration of why people prefer grafted fruit trees (where every tree is like its parent) that we have left the entire planting to use in our educational program.

Trees began to produce fruit in 2-3 years. Four give orange fruit, but on three it turns from green to nearly white, to pale orange as it ripens. Two of the orange-fruited trees are very sour, one is moderately sour, and the other is sweet. Two of the light-colored fruits are slightly sour with fair flavor, but we think that one tastes as good as or better than commercial varieties. (It will not become a commercial variety because the ideal commercial shape here is long with short “wings,” which are less likely to be damaged in shipping. All these seedlings were shorter and had longer wings than the commercial varieties.) Several are good enough to leave for fruit production.

If you do not have sweet carambola in your country, you may request a packet of seed and we will send seed when available. Seeds reportedly cannot be stored, so we will probably send them in moist peat moss. They may be germinating by the time they arrive, so plant at once. You will probably find that you like fruit from some trees very much and some not at all. You may even find one that will be so good it will become a new variety for your country. (At ECHO we graft our best varieties to limbs of trees with sour fruit.)

ECHO’s interns tell us carambola is one of their favorite juices. They remove any green tips on the “wings” (which can have an off-flavor) and mix with some kind of citrus juice and sugar. Dr. Julia Morton warns that the content of oxalates is so high that the fruit should not be consumed in large quantity. The less sour varieties have less oxalic acid.

Comments:

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