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## The Chocolate Pudding Tree: *Diospyros digyna* (Black Sapote, Black Persimmon, Zapote Negro)

Grace Ju

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Paul Noren, a recent visitor to ECHO, told me that they have one hectare of black sapote growing and doing well in the tropical rainforest in Kanana, Congo. The people have enjoyed this introduced fruit and eat it fresh after the fruit has ripened and softened and the inside has turned into a dark brown chocolate color. At first glance, most people would be turned off by the dark mushy flesh, but those who look past the unusual appearance will enjoy a delightful tasting, sweet and nutritious fruit nicknamed "chocolate pudding fruit." Originally from Mexico, the popularity of this fruit is starting to spread outside Central America. Paul Noren says that the Congolese do enjoy this fruit very much but one disadvantage is that it takes 5 to 6 years to bear fruit. The stand of 400 trees started from seeds 17 years ago is now a thick forest and has shaded out all the imperata grass. It has thrived with little cultivation.

The fruit is the size of a tomato, about 10 cm in diameter. The fruit can weigh 200 to 900g and has about 2 to 10 seeds inside, although some trees bear seedless fruit. The fruit has a thin but firm shiny dark green coat with a persistent and large calyx that stays green (Figure 2). When it ripens on the tree or after it is picked, the fruit turns darker green to dull brown. It is ready to eat when it has softened completely (1 to 2 weeks at room temperature); it will feel very mushy. The unripe fruit is very astringent and caustic. Nutritionally, it has a fair amount of vitamin A and potassium, and has four times more vitamin C than an orange ([www.daleysfruit.com.au/fruit%20pages/blksapote.htm](http://www.daleysfruit.com.au/fruit%20pages/blksapote.htm) (<http://www.daleysfruit.com.au/fruit%20pages/blksapote.htm/>)).

*Figure 2: Photo of black sapote fruit, including some that are cut open and ready to eat. Seeds are pictured at the front of the plate. Photo by Oscar Jaitt, Fruit Lover's Nursery. Used with permission.*

A handsome evergreen tree, black sapote can grow up to 25 m (80 ft). It grows well in hot lowland tropical climates and enjoys a climate with distinct wet and dry seasons. However, it can grow as high as 1,500 to 1,800m (5,000 to 6,000ft) (Julia Morton, Fruits of Warm Climates). In drier areas, it thrives with irrigation. The tree can tolerate a wide range of soils and nutrient conditions. It requires full sun and can tolerate temperatures as high as 42°C and as low as -2°C (28°F). Young trees should be protected from wind and frost. Propagation is usually by cleft grafting or by seeds. Seeds can be stored in cool, dry storage for a few months. The seedlings



can be set in the field when they are 1 to 2 years old and should be spaced at least 12m (40 ft) apart. (Morton).

There are many ways to eat this rich, pudding-like fruit. Because it has a mild flavor, it can be added to different fruit drinks. ECHO's executive director's wife likes to add whipped cream to chilled halves of black sapote for a nice dessert. Our interns have made black sapote bread and a pudding made with mashed black sapote, whipped cream, sugar and cocoa. Our farm manager likes to

make a breakfast porridge with the pulp, raw oats, peanut butter, powdered milk and honey. There are many recipes for black sapote pie, mousse, cake, and Dulce de Sapote Negro. In the Philippines, the pulp is served with milk or orange juice poured over it.

Check ECHO's website ([www.echocommunity.org](http://www.echocommunity.org) (<http://www.echocommunity.org/>)) for links to recipes that use black sapote.

We will have seeds available in the late fall (November). Those working in agricultural development in developing countries may request one free sample packet of black sapote seed.