The format of the pages in this E-guide are designed so that the images can be printed out on standard 10 x 15 cm photo paper, then bound. You may like to laminate your printouts for durability. On the other hand you might just like to keep this file on your mobile phone, personal organiser or laptop.
INTRODUCTION

The world of edible ‘wild’ foods is such an exciting frontier to be involved with that this very small E-book has been produced to introduce folks to edible tropical fruits and fruit products... It is only meant to provide a brief snapshot of what is available in the tropics and not intended to be a definitive guide to the subject. It must be said, also, that many of the species covered in this E-book are in quite general use as daily foods in many parts of the world, but being able to identify them in the wild could be of use to travellers backpacking in far off places.

In some cases the species are found in jungle or tropical-type forest habitats. That, however, does not mean that a tree found on its ‘lonesome’ does not belong to a person, family, or local community – the rural communities of many cultures not having the Western concept of fencing off what belongs to them, particularly in areas of forest or open rangeland. So, do be aware of that...

If you are lucky enough to live in a large City then just maybe you can find some of the fruit products in this E-book are available, or if you travel abroad to the regions covered you may well find them being sold in local markets.
Please DO try them (providing that you get correct preparation details).

Finally, a big thank you to everyone who has made their pictures available to illustrate this E-book, particularly the photographic libraries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and US Department of Agriculture, and those individuals who have generously made their work available in a spirit of spreading knowledge and enlightenment. At some stage in the future it is intended to expand this E-book further, so anyone wishing to contribute picture updates or images of tropical fruiting species not included in this first edition please get in touch.

Marcus Harrison
November, 2010
FORAGING IN THE TROPICS...

Let’s imagine that you are marooned on a tropical shore, miles away from your regular comfort food and life’s luxuries. What would you eat? More precisely, would you know what to eat? Of course there might be edible seaweeds available around the coastal area, and various fish and shellfish to hand as well. And then there’s the shoreline with its exotic vegetation, and the foraging potential of the hinterland behind the shoreline.

Or perhaps you are travelling in the tropics by car and it breaks down miles from human contact. Would you recognise the fruits around you that could sustain you until rescue arrives or you find help? Well this E-book is designed to familiarise you with a variety of tropical fruits that might help you get along, plus a few others that you may like to explore simply as foodstuffs.

To begin with it should be understood that the tropics cover a vast swathe of the planet between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn and includes some of the most luxuriant rain forest (jungle) in the equatorial regions but also the inhospitable desert regions of the Sahara and Arabia towards the northern aspect.

In fact the type of habitats within the tropics varies enormously. At the equator, which receives
the full blast of the sun’s rays overhead, flat and rolling inland areas away from coastal winds can develop into full ‘primary’ tropical rainforest. These are forests untouched by Man, their tall trees producing such a dark and gloomy environment below that much vegetation finds it difficult to grow. However, with a relatively uniform and high temperature, plus humidity at over 80%, vegetation grows fast where light can penetrate the tree canopy (for example, where a tree collapses or a river or stream and provides a natural break for the ingress of light).

On steep slopes the lateral aspect of the sun can sometimes provide better illumination for the plants below, making vegetative growth possible where it would otherwise not be the case.

Another type of tropical rainforest (Secondary) exists where Man has cleared the jungle through ‘slash and burn’ in an effort to provide cultivated food. When the soil is no longer fertile mankind moves on and the true jungle species reassert their dominance over the landscape. However, in these secondary rainforest areas there is a good chance that some cultivated stragglers remain behind as legacy species that the tropical forager, survivor, or jungle visitor can harvest and utilise.

Then we have monsoon forests (around India and Indo-China for example) which differ
from the true tropical rainforest in that they have a more ‘open’, less luxuriant, character caused by weather systems that deliver alternating rainy and dry seasons with abundant rain and lengthy dry periods. The latter results in leaf fall which allows light to reach the ground and vegetative growth to thrive. These are the sorts of area where you might find bamboo thickets on the ground, while the main tree types will include species such as teak.

Heading out of the forest areas we may come to less luxuriant, sub-tropical, savannah woodlands where the dry periods are longer and which are characterized by more grasses and herbaceous growth, while scattered trees are more likely to be found near watercourses. These areas are found widely in tropical and sub-tropical areas, most notably in East and Central Africa, Brazil, India and parts of China.

There are also tropical thorn-woodlands too (often on sandy or limestone soils), where the foliage is frequently scaly or prickly, and root systems penetrate deep into the soil for water. Bordering areas like the Sahara semi-desert scrub (somewhere between thorn-woodland true desert) can form. Acacias are often present, and cacti, agaves, aloes and yuccas characteristic.

We also have tropical and sub-tropical deserts like those of the Sahara and Arabian
Peninsula, and north-west India. These types of arid habitat present the would-be tropical forager with a formidable challenge.

And then there are mangrove swamps in various parts of the tropics. There are pickings to be had (in terms of the vegetable kingdom) such as the looking-glass mangrove (*Heritiera littoralis*) but those pickings are rather meagre. Indeed, mangrove swamps present another formidable challenge, being physically very difficult to traverse because of the mangrove root systems, while the need to factor in rising tides, plus a host of bugs and other nibbling and biting nasties, makes mangrove swamp a place that you do not really want to be out of choice.

So, as you can see, ‘the tropics’ are enormously varied and what follows is a small snapshot of the many plant species that are found in tropical regions which provide man with something to eat. Some species have been taken from the wild, tamed, and turned into commercial cultivars, while others might be found as legacy plants in land that has returned to nature, or have escaped from cultivation into the wild (very much as ornamental plant species escape from garden cultivation into the wild in northern temperate climes, or a discarded apple or pear core one day produces a fruit-bearing tree).

*Bon appetit!*
SOURSOP - *Annona muricata*

The *Annona* genus is a large one with more than a hundred tropical and sub-tropical species, and all of which look somewhat similar in terms of their fruiting bodies.

The sour-like fruit of *A. muricata* (opposite, top), which grows in the northern part of South America, has a rather fibrous texture so tends not to be eaten raw but is, rather, juiced for fruit drinks and ice cream. Where the fruit flesh is not quite so fibrous and is less sour, then it can be eaten raw. Sometimes the fruit is cooked with sugar syrup as a dessert.

Perhaps the best known of the *Annona* family is the Custard or Sugar Apple (*A. squamosa*) with the fruits having a sweet, banana-custard-like flavoured, white flesh which is eaten fresh or made into drinks. It is sometimes also called the Sweetsop, and in some areas of the tropics has become an invasive species – lucky for some! Another edible relation is *Annona cherimoli* or the cherimoya which is native to Ecuador and Peru.

The bottom picture overleaf is a cross section of the related Mountain Soursop. Around the tropical world research goes on to develop new varieties of the *Annona* genus for commercial use. The second pair of pictures is one of those commercial sweet varieties as mentioned.
BREADFRUIT - Artocarpus altilis

Breadfruit has possibly to be one of the best known tropical fruits - at least in terms of its name - since it was this plant species that became the focus for the famous *Bounty* mutiny in the 18th century.

Breadfruit is a fast-growing tree that can reach 50 to 60ft. in height, and is native to the humid tropical climates of the Pacific Islands, Indonesia and Malaya, but is also grown in the West Indies.

The fruits can provide two edible sources of food: the white flesh has a somewhat potato-like consistency when cooked (and is used widely in the tropics where potato might otherwise be used as a culinary ingredient), and where the fruit develops seeds (not all do) these can be roasted and eaten.
Artocarpus altilis

Photo: FAO / Susan Braatz / FO-6556
Artocarpus sp.

Photos: Marcus Harrison
JACKFRUIT - *Artocarpus heterophyllus*

The Jackfruit is a species related to the previous Breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*) and is native to an area stretching from India to Malaysia. Both species, incidentally, are members of the Mulberry family.

Like breadfruit trees the jackfruit is a fast growing species of the humid tropics. The fruit, however, has an unpleasant smell (some hotels and establishments in the tropics ban it from their premises), yet a sweet taste and is full of starches. The seeds may also be eaten. Like the breadfruit the individual fruits can reach a huge size, reaching 3ft. long in some cases. Initially the fruits are green but turn yellowish as they ripen (as in the images that follow).
HART 27  Artocarpus heterophyllus

Photo: USDA
Confusingly, the perennial deciduous shrub or small tree *Asimina triloba* is called ‘pawpaw’ (true pawpaw can be found on page 30) and belongs to the *Annonaceae* or custard apple family (page 10). It is more of a temperate species than tropical but will be found in small pockets in Florida and westwards towards Texas (frequently in moist valley bottoms or similar which have a good sunny aspect), and are the largest native fruit in the US although they are under utilised. However, it should be regarded as a temperate species and is included here for interest.

The fruit is sweet with an almost banana-pineapple taste and can reach up to 6 inches in length and about three inches wide with a yellow-brown skin when ripe. Use the fruit raw or cooked, or in desserts, preserves or ice cream. A *word of caution* here: the bean shaped seeds must not be eaten, and the fruit may also cause dermatitis, so a degree of caution should be exercised when picking and preparing the fruit until you know how you react.
STAR FRUIT - *Averrhoa carambola*

Carambola is a deciduous, slow-growing, short-trunked tree that reaches about 20 to 30ft. in height, and is probably native to South-East Asia being both adapted to hot humid conditions but also tolerating sub-tropical conditions. However, it is widely grown – from South-East Asia and Malaysia to southern China, Taiwan, India, tropical West Africa and Zanzibar, Central and tropical South America, some of the Caribbean islands and South Pacific, the Philippines, and Queensland, Australia.

The fruit, which has an orange-yellow coloured waxy-looking skin when fully ripe, is very distinctive, having 5 or 6 angles that give the fruit a star-like appearance in cross-section. The fruits are of two types (both contain oxalic acid): one with lots of oxalic acid, the other less so and containing some sugars. The fruits are eaten raw, in salads, cooked as desserts, used in curries, made into preserves, and juiced as a refreshing beverage.
PEACH PALM - *Bactris gassipaes*

The Peach Palm is an evergreen species of tree reaching around 60ft. in height, and which grows in the tropical, humid, lowland forests of South and Central America.

The red skinned fruit (when ripe) has an edible flesh surrounding a single seed, and may be eaten raw, made into conserves, boiled in salted water, and also ground into flour. Frequently a fermented beverage is made from the fruit, while edible palm hearts may also be extracted from the *Bactris* palm.

There are commercial hybrids and variants of the Peach Palm and in some of them the fruit ripens to a yellow or orange colour, while oil may be extracted from the seeds of some varieties.
AFRICAN FAN PALM or BORASSUS / PALMYRA PALM - *Borassus aethiopum*

Several different names exist for this species but as the first one suggests this palm species is a native of Africa - particularly along rivers, in savannah and coastal woodlands. Growing to a height of 60 or 70ft. this palm provides local people with a wealth of products from fruit, to fibre from the leaves, to wood for construction, charcoal and firewood.

The fibrous pulp of the fruits may be eaten raw, or preferably cooked (frequently with rice), while the immature seeds contain an albumen-like jelly with a refreshing, sweet, taste. Apparently the seeds are sometimes germinated and the early shoots eaten. The seeds also provide an oil, while the sap from the flower spikes is fermented for palm wine.
Borassus aethiopum

Photo: FAO / Roberto Faidutti / CFU000138

Photo: FAO / Roberto Faidutti / CFU000125
CAPER BUSH – Capparis spinosa

The caper bush is best known for the pickled flower buds that find their way into the list of kitchen ingredients. However, if the plant is allowed to flower it can give rise to an edible fruit that is eaten when ripe (caperfruit).

Drought-tolerant, Capparis spinosa is a highly variable perennial species of rocky, gravelly, semi-arid habitats on the fringe of the northern tropics (North Africa, parts of the Middle East), rather than in the deep humid tropics, and grows to about 3 or 4ft. high. In the Mediterranean region it is quite widely grown for commercial purposes. The fruit of the specimen pictured (from Egyptian Sinai region) is about 2½ inches long.

The ripe fruits of C. decidua (Leafless Caper Bush), which can be found growing in parts of the Indian sub-continent, are also used as food, with unripe ones being cooked as a vegetable or pickled. This species can reach about 15ft. in height and produces smooth round fruits about ½-inch in diameter.
PAPAYA / PAWPAW - Carica papaya

Papaya is a species of short-lived, fast growing, evergreen tree native to the tropics of the Americas, and grows some 20 to 30ft. high, the soft stem being deeply indented where the leaves and fruits were attached. Papaya is also grown in southern India, Kenya, Hawaii, Australia and other tropical habitats where there is medium-low humidity, and in environments where the winds are not too strong. It can almost be a weed in some areas but the fruit of wild varieties is generally bitter unlike commercial cultivars.

Yellow-orange when ripe, the pear-shaped fruit generally reaches 8 to 10 inches in length and has a softish, tasty, pinky-orange, flesh that is eaten raw with the seeds and skin removed. The texture is a bit like melon. The leaves and fruit contain an active enzyme in a latex form which is used for tenderizing meat which is why unripe fruits should not be eaten, although green fruits can be eaten as a vegetable if cooked though they do not have much flavour. The young leaves and shoots may also be cooked and eaten as food, and apparently in Java the flowers are eaten. The seeds have a peppery flavour but they must not be eaten in quantity.

www.wildfoodschoo.co.uk
Carica papaya

Photo: Marcus Harrison
SEA GRAPE - *Coccoloba uvifera*

The Sea Grape is a salt-tolerant, evergreen, tree (but can also form a mass of sprawling stems) which grows around the tropical coasts of the Gulf of Mexico, West Indies and shorelines of northern South America.

The long tufts of flowers produce clusters of acid flavoured edible purple fruits which are often used to make jellies as they are really too sharp as a raw fruit.

It’s distinctive kidney-shaped leaves become orange or purple-coloured before they drop.
Coccoloba uvifera
COCONUT PALM - *Cocos nucifera*

No tropical picture would be complete without the presence of the evergreen coconut palm which can attain a height of 70ft., sometimes higher, while being able tolerate winds and the salty conditions found along tropical shorelines. Poor drainage conditions do not suit this palm which is grown in nearly a hundred countries.

The ovoid fruit which forms is the source of the oily coconut ‘meat’ or kernel which finds its way into so many human foodstuffs, particularly in tropical countries where coconut is eaten by millions of people and is sometimes called ‘*the tree of life*’. Young coconut fruits also contain a watery liquid or ‘milk’ which is edible, while the sap of unopened flower heads is harvested to make an alcoholic beverage or boiled down to produce sugar.
LONGAN - *Dimocarpus longan*

Native to southern China, Myanmar and possibly parts of southern India and Sri Lanka the longan is related to the lychee, growing to some 30 or 40ft. in height at higher elevations where there are periods of cool weather but not excessive harsh frosts.

The round fruits, which grow up to about one inch in diameter, form in clusters and may be eaten raw or cooked, but are also canned in syrup and dried to make a fruit drink. The brittle yellow-brown skin is discarded and the somewhat translucent, white, and slightly sweet flesh eaten. The black seeds are not edible but can be used as a shampoo as they contain saponins.
Dimocarpus longan

Photos: Marcus Harrison
BLACK SAPOTE / BLACK PERSIMMON
Diospyros digyna

This slow-growing tree species (reaching 70 to 80ft. in height) is native to the coasts of Mexico and the forested lowlands of Central America south to Colombia, but is frequently cultivated in the area, particularly in Mexico. In that country the fruit is commonly sold, although outside the region it is largely unknown.

The fruits almost look almost like a green tomato, growing some 2 to 4 inches wide with a thin inedible bright green skin when immature, ripening to a more muddy olive-green colour. Internally the ripe fruit has a jelly-like, dark brown, sweet pulp. This pulp is used for pies, a dessert, ice cream, and even fermented to make a liqueur. Unripe fruits should not be used.
Diospyros digyna

Photo: Yonathan Galle
AFRICAN OIL PALM - *Elaeis guineensis*

The evergreen oil palm is one of the world’s most important commercial species of palm. Although native to West Africa it can be found throughout many tropical countries as the species has been imported for oil production. It can even be found growing in Florida. Malaysia and Indonesia are currently the world’s largest suppliers of palm oil which is used for everything from cooking oil, margarine, mayonnaise and ice cream, to cosmetics and soap.

Both the fruit and its seed contain oil. Individual palm nuts are also used in human food: the nuts cooked until the kernels are soft and then mashed to separate out the kernel and the resulting liquid in the pan being added to soups and stews. The male flowers can be tapped for their sap to make ‘palm wine’ while the central shoot may be harvested as edible palm heart.

Many other palm species also provide palm heart for human consumption, edible sap and fruits. Some species, like *Metroxylon sago* (Sago Palm), produce edible starch in their trunks.
ASSAI or ACAI PALM – *Euterpe oleracea*

Assai is an evergreen palm tree native to the tropics of Central and South America, and can grow to about 90ft. high in ideal conditions. Favouring swampy areas and floodplains the assai palm produces clusters of round, purple-black, nutrient-rich berries twice a year. In size they range from about ½ to 1 inch in diameter, and have a thin flesh round a single large seed.

In Brazil assai fruit is commonly used. Although the fruit can be eaten raw it is generally pulped to extract the juice which is then used in desserts, ice cream, beverages (with or without sugar), and sometimes served with tapioca. The first pictures show the unripe berries while the second ones show ripe assai berries for sale in a local market and juice extraction.

The palm stems are also used to harvest palm hearts for human consumption. The fruits and palm hearts of the related *Euterpe edulis* are also utilised for human food. Palm hearts can be anything from 2 to 4 inches wide and have an artichoke-like flavour with the texture of asparagus. However, harvesting this vegetable kills the palm.

www.wildfoodschool.co.uk
Euterpe oleracea
Euterpe oleracea

Photo: Marcus Harrison
MANGOSTEEN - *Garcinia mangostana*

The mangosteen is a small, slow-growing, evergreen tree species that can reach around 80ft. in height and is thought to have originated in the Moluccas and is cultivated in the humid, moisture-abundant, tropical lowlands of South-East Asia, and some parts of the Philippines.

The round, dark-purple to red-purple smooth fruit has a thick and quite hard red-coloured rind enclosing from 4 to 7 white, soft-fleshed, acid to sub-acid tasting segments. Inside the juicy white flesh (which is eaten fresh as a dessert fruit) are the seeds which are not eaten. The fruit is sometimes canned and made into jam.

www.wildfoods学校.co.uk
Garcinia mangostana

Photos: Marcus Harrison
DRAGONFRUIT - *Hylocereus* sp.

Also known as *pitaya* there are a number of *Hylocereus* species which are grown as fruit. They are, in fact, the fruits of vine cacti, having a yellow to red skin with scales, and a seedy white to red flesh. Being tolerant of both dry and tropical conditions various varieties have been introduced in hotter parts of the world from Latin America to Asia. The red fleshed specimen pictured may be *H. costaricensis* or a commercial cultivar of that variety.
LONGKONG - *Lansium domesticum*

While they may look a little like new potatoes the clustered fruit of the longkong (also called *langsat*) could not taste more different, the flesh having a taste almost like a sweet grapefruit. However, the green seeds of the translucent creamy coloured fruit are very bitter and are not eaten. The fruit can be eaten raw or cooked.

The longkong tree grows from about 30 to 50ft. tall and needs a moist, humid, tropical habitat and a well-drained acid soil. It does not tolerate long dry periods well, or alkali soils. Although longkong originates in the Malay tropics it is widely grown in much of south-east Asia, the humid areas of southern India, the Philippines and Hawaii, but is largely absent in the tropics of America. The pictured longkong is the thin skinned commercial variety whereas the ‘wild’ form has a much thicker skin, often with a milky latex in the skin.
Lansium domesticum
LYCHEE - *Litchi chinensis*

The lychee is perhaps one of the best known tropical fruits in the Western world (often being served as a dessert fruit in Chinese restaurants) other than mango, coconut and dates. It is native to parts of southern China, particularly riverine habitats and areas close to coasts with tropical and sub-tropical climes. Today the lychee is extensively grown in parts of the Indian sub-continent, Myanmar, Taiwan, Philippines, Japan, Brazil and South Africa.

A slow-growing evergreen tree that sometimes reaches 50+ feet in height, but generally in a range of about 12 to 35ft. tall, the lychee produces loose clusters of round or ovate fruits with a leathery skin of a yellow-amber to rose-red colour. Removing the skin reveals a succulent, almost translucent, white flesh with a sub-acid taste. Although normally eaten fresh the fruit is also dried and pickled.
Litchi chinensis
ACEROLA / BARBADOS or DWARF CHERRY - Malpighia punicifolia

The evergreen Barbados cherry (related to *M. glabra*) is a large, bushy shrub or small tree reaching up to 20ft. high and is native to parts of the West Indies, though it is not grown in other tropical areas for its juicy dessert fruits which have an acid to sub-acid flavour. When ripe the thin-skinned scarlet fruits can be eaten out of hand and have a raspberry-like taste, but are sometimes a little too sharp to eat raw and are cooked. When stewed with sugar, juiced, or made into jellies and preserves they take on a more green apple flavour. The seeds should not be consumed, and there are some reports that eating the fruit in large quantities can cause intestinal problems.
MANGO - *Mangifera indica*

The long-lived mango tree can grow over 100ft. high and is native to southern Asia. Preferring tropical lowlands where there is well-drained soil, plus good rainfall in the summer months followed by a dry season, this species has been cultivated for centuries. Indeed, it is estimated that there are some 350 cultivars and over 500 named varieties.

The fruit is highly variable in shape, size and colour. Generally the fruits are ovoid-oblong and slightly lob-sided, and in some varieties will attain a length of 10 inches. The skin is fairly thick, can range from green to orange-red in colour or sometimes flushed with scarlet, and this surrounds a sweet to sub-acid flesh which varies from pale yellow to orange in colour. The flavour is a bit peach/pineapple-like. Unripe fruits are used to prepare pickles and chutney while ripe fruits can be juiced, eaten fresh, or made into jellies and preserves.
Mangifera indica
DOMINICAN LOQUAT - *Manilkara huberi*

The Dominican loquat tree can grow to more than 100ft. tall in optimum conditions.

The brown-skinned Nispero, as this tropical fruit is called locally, has a somewhat white-orange to reddish flesh, is sweet to acid in taste, and has an aromatic pulp. This tropical fruit often finds uses in ice cream and desserts, confectionery, jams and preserves.

The true loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*) as I call it, is a small, evergreen tree or large shrub native to sub-tropical parts of the Orient, but is now grown in countries such as Spain, Brazil and India. The ripe round fruits of this species are golden-yellow to orange with a sweet, tasty, soft and juicy flesh which is white to orange in colour. They are largely eaten fresh but may be cooked or made into preserves, jellies and syrup.
Manilkara huberi

Photo: Fev
Rambutan is a native of Malaysia and Indonesia where it thrives in hot humid conditions, but is also grown in coastal lowlands of the Caribbean and northern South America, as well as the Philippines. Good trees can crop twice a year.

The oval or elliptical fruit is a somewhat hairy, and has a thin leathery skin that can vary in colour from yellow through red to almost purple, depending on the variety. Within the skin is a sweet (sometimes sub-acid) and juicy translucent flesh which varies from white to rose-tinted.

The peeled fruits are eaten raw or sometimes stewed as a dessert (particularly if they are sub-acid or sour), made into preserves or jams, or canned in syrup. The kernels of the seed contain an edible solid fat and are, apparently, roasted in the Philippines and eaten (in their raw state it is said the seeds are toxic).
PRICKLY PEAR - *Opuntia* sp.

The prickly pear, also called the Indian Fig, is a cactus native to tropical America and found in semi-arid rangeland and desert areas. Indeed, it has been used in some parts of North Africa to try and stabilise sand dunes. There are many varieties of *Opuntia* and they also hybridize easily.

In some places prickly pear cactus is regarded as a nuisance weed while in others the fruits (and also in Mexico the leaf pads) provide a valuable foodstuff. In the Mexican example the species is grown commercially, the leaf pads being stripped of their spines and irritant bristles and sold in markets to be used in salads when young or cooked as a vegetable. They have a taste somewhat like green beans, while the fruits are often available for six months of the year. In Italy, Spain, Egypt, Morocco, Israel, South Africa, South-West Asia, parts of South America, Australia and United States prickly pear is cropped. In the latter country it is a problem weed in some parts.

The yellow to scarlet fruits (purple-black in some varieties) are peeled and the sweet, generally red to purple, flesh consumed. Some varieties have a more creamy yellow flesh.

www.wildfoodscool.co.uk
PASSIONFRUIT - *Passiflora edulis*

There are an estimated 500 *Passiflora* species around the world, but only the evergreen perennial *Passiflora edulis* is technically called passionfruit. It is native to South America with there being two sorts (one having yellow fruits the other purple-brown, and looking a bit like hen’s eggs on a vine). In Brazil the yellow variety is juiced while the inner part of the purple type is eaten fresh. The first fruit pictured is an immature one.

Passionfruit is now grown almost around the world in hot areas. India, Sri, Lanka, Australia, Kenya, Hawaii, South Africa and many other countries have commercial growing operations.

The part eaten is the seedy pulp inside the leathery skin and its soft white pith, with or without the seeds. For making drinks, ice cream, jams, jellies, and flavouring yoghurt the pulp is separated from the seeds mechanically.
CANARY ISLAND DATE PALM & TRUE DATE PALM - *Phoenix canariensis* & *dactylifera*

The evergreen Canary Island Date Palm (see first picture) is native to the Canary Island but is also planted as an ornamental species in the southern US states from Florida to California as it tolerates sandy soils, drought conditions and moderately high salt aerosols brought in from the sea.

This species is included as more of a curiosity since the ‘dates’ which this palm produces are not really palatable like the true date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera* – see second picture) but it produces an edible sap that may be transformed into an edible syrup.
Phoenix canariensis

Photo: Kahuroa
Phoenix dactylifera
Phoenix sp.

Photo: Marcus Harrison
Phoenix sp.

Photos: Marcus Harrison
MAMEY SAPOTE - *Pouteria sapota*

Native to the lowland tropics of Central America and southern Mexico the mamey sapote tree produces a large, sweet, and vitamin rich, pinky-orange fleshed fruit which can be eaten raw, cooked and used like puréed apples, or made into ice cream, sherbets, and jams. The seeds are sometimes ground and used as a flavouring though caution is perhaps advised since they may be deleterious in quantity. Sap from the green fruit and bark is also irritant to skin and eyes. Some reports say the seeds and skins are toxic.

The sapote is also sometimes cultivated and the fruits can vary in shape and colour - from round or almost egg-shaped and the skins varying in colour from brown to a dull red.
GUAVA - *Psidium guayava*

The guava is thought to be a native of tropical south America, but it is also found in Mexico, Brazil, Central America, the West Indies, Florida and nearby gulf states, South Africa, India, Malaysia and the Philippines. In some environments wild guava thickets develop and have to be eradicated as a serious weed. A shrub or small tree species (growing to about 30ft tall), guava does best where there is lots of sunshine but also grows in humid and wet conditions although the fruit is often of a poorer quality.

Guava fruits are about 2 to 4 inches long and are rich in vitamin C, being eaten raw or used to make jellies, preserves, juice. When ripe the skin can be anything from pale green through yellow, to scarlet occasionally. The quality of the fruit is dependent on the cultivar variety: some are quite seedy, while the soft flesh varies from creamy white to yellow and pink-red, with a sweet to slightly acid flavour.

The pineapple guava (*Feijoa sellowiana*) - an evergreen shrub or small tree - is native to parts of northern South America. The round to egg-shaped fruit has a minty-pineapple flavoured green-white flesh. The slightly sweet flower petals are eaten too.

[www.wildfoodscool.co.uk](http://www.wildfoodscool.co.uk)
Psidium guajava

Photo: Marcus Harrison
POMEGRANATE - *Punica granatum*

A deciduous shrub or small tree the pomegranate is native to parts of the Middle East but has been introduced to many other parts of the world with conditions of low humidity or dryness and long hours of sunshine to ripen the fruit, though it is also tolerant of cool winters. There are hundreds of cultivars in commercial use.

The mature fruits are about 4 inches in diameter and contain hundreds of seeds covered with an edible juicy flesh that varies in sweetness, acidity and astringency. These can be spooned out of the fruit or pressed for their juice.
MOMBIN - *Spondias* sp.

There are several *Spondias* species from around the tropics with edible fruit. One of the best known is the sharp-flavoured Purple Mombin (*Spondias purpurea*) which is widespread in the tropical north of South America, Central America, Mexico the Caribbean and in Florida (planted). Sometimes called jacote fruit (the pictured Jacote fruit comes from Guatemala). The kernels of the cracked stones of this species can also be eaten.

Another species, *Spondias dulcis*, is known as the Yellow Mombin and has yellow-orange to purple-red fruits with an acidic taste.

And then there is the less pleasant, acid tasting, Hog Plum (*Spondias mombin*) which comes from the rainforests of northern South America, Central America and West Indies.
Spondias sp.

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Generally speaking the common name ‘bamboo’ relates to members of *Bambusa*, a number of which provide food for humans in tropical parts of the world, particularly in tropical Asia. And although they do not fall precisely into the topic of ‘tropical fruits’ it seemed appropriate to mention them since this group of plants is widely associated with the tropics.

Most often it is the young shoots, buds and, just occasionally, the leaves which are used cooked. Some are fine when very young but become bitter and acrid with age. In one instance the plants are earthed-up like celery to make them palatable.

Members of a number of other ‘bamboo’ families (*Arundinaria, Gigantochloa, Melocalamus, Melocanna, Phyllostachys,* and *Semiarundinaria*) can also provide human food. Some have edible fruits and seeds, others similarly provide edible young shoots when prepared correctly.