The Fruits of Thailand

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Fruit Is Part Of the Adventure

Traveling in Thailand is a jolt out of the hum drum, predictable pace of life. Sure, we want to lie out on the sparkling sand under coconut palms, but a trip to Thailand is about the adventure. We crave the exotic new smells, the bright and overwhelming colors, the noise and the heat and the excitement.

Fruit is part of what makes Thailand exotic. They come in a surprising diversity of shapes and sizes and colors that spread across the rainbow. Some smell sweet and floral while others are overwhelmingly pungent or earthy and sulfurous.

Part of what makes a new fruit exotic is that the taste will be incomparable to anything you’ve tasted at home. While it is exciting to eat Pad Thai at a sidewalk café as motorbikes wind haphazardly around you, you’ve probably tasted rice and noodles before. The texture is unsurprising, and while the flavor may be surprisingly tasty, it’s nothing out of your experience.

With a new tropical fruit, there really is no way to mentally prepare for the sensual assault of texture, aroma, and flavor. Some will be crunchy and slightly astringent, others chewy and tart, some slimy and sweet, and others creamy and rich. Imagine the lumpy green spikes of a soursop, or the brilliantly magenta flesh of a dragonfruit, and try to guess what familiar food it might taste like.

Yet there’s no reason to feel timid about tasting a new fruit, the way we might feel slightly disgusted and nervous about popping a fried cockroach in our mouths. Fruit is almost always sweet, and while the flavor may range from mildly insipid to tangy or floral, earthy or spicy or pungent or face-scrunchingly sour, it’s not likely to be revolting or cue the gag reflex (like the thought of all those crunchy little legs).

And the most amazing thing is that it grows on a plant, naturally, just the way it is.

So if you’re looking for an eye opening, adventurous holiday in Thailand, you might as well take advantage of the huge variety of tropical fruits. If it helps to convince you, remember that they’re full of healthy antioxidants to help battle all those rancid fats from the fried cockroaches.

The goal of this book is to inspire you to taste new fruits in Thailand. By providing photos and names, we’ll help you recognize different types of fruit that you might otherwise pass by without noticing. We’ll tell you how to choose a good one, how to eat it, how you may see Thai people eating it, and tell you about any festivals to celebrate particular fruits.

This book is not by any means an in-depth resource. Experts on Thailand’s fruit estimate that there are well over 1,000 native and introduced fruits grown in Thailand. To cover all of those fruits would be way beyond the scope of what these humble durian hunters can do. This booklet is a simple overview of the fruits we’ve personally seen on our jaunts through the markets and orchards of Thailand.

That’s why we’ve included a list of uncommon fruits and more resources at the end so that you can be the biggest fruit nerd you want to be. We totally support that.

We hope you have a great time trying new things in Thailand!

Rob and Lindsay
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FRUIT FESTIVALS OF THAILAND

Fruit festivals in Thailand are relaxed affairs. They usually have a carny vibe and involve everything from bounce houses to ice cream trucks to food and clothing bazaars. In addition, many festivals put on a beauty pageant where the crowning beauty is named after the festival’s hosting fruit (ex. Miss Durian). Noteworthy is the Yala Fruit Festival, which includes a ladyboy pageant. Even when they maintain a fruit focus, most put emphasis on fruit products and culinary concoctions. The dates are usually not published until just a few weeks beforehand, making it difficult to plan a trip from very far away. Worse, since the season is slightly different every year, there is no guarantee when exactly the fruit will be ripe and the festival will occur. You can usually guess within a two week range, but there will always be outlier years. Use the contact information provided to check the dates before you go.

January
Tamarind Festival – Petchabun (sometimes occurs in February)

February
Strawberry Festival – Samoeng District, Chiang Mai. Website.
Gran Monte Asoke Valley Grape Harvest Festival – Nakhon Ratchasima Website.

March
Sweet Grape Fair – Damnoen Saduak District. Ratchaburi (sometimes occurs in April). Email TAT Petchaburi, or Facebook.
Marian Plum Fair – Nakhon Nayok. Email TAT Nakhon Nayok or Facebook.

April
Mango Festival – Chachoengsao Email TAT Bangkok.
Lychee Festival – Samut Songkhram. Email TAT Samut Songkhram, Facebook.
Cantaloupe Day - Aranyaprathet District, Sa Keao Province. Email TAT Nakhon Nayok or Facebook.
Sweet Pineapple Festival - Pluak Daeng District, Rayong. Email TAT Rayong, Facebook.

May
Pineapple Festival - Nong Lae District, Chiang Rai. Contact TAT Chiang Rai or Facebook.
Lychee – Payao. Contact TAT Chiang Rai, Facebook.
Rayong Fruit Festival – Rayong. Check our Durian Festival Page.

June
Chanthaburi Durian Festival. Check our Durian Festival Page.
Si Sa Ket Durian and Rambutan Fair. Check our Durian Festival Page.
Sweet Santol Festival – Lopburi. Contact TAT Lopburi, Facebook.

July
Custard Apple Festival, Nakhon Ratchasima. Contact TAT Nakhon Ratchasima, Facebook.
Rambutan Festival, Surat Thani. Contact TAT Surat Thani, Facebook.
Uttaradit Durian Festival. Check our Durian Festival Page.
August

September

October
Banana Festival - Kamphaeng Phet. Contact TAT Sukhothai.

November
No festivals that we know of.

December
Golden Orange Festival – Nan. Contact TAT Phrae, Facebook.
Banana

*Musa acuminata, Musa balbisiana*, and hybrids

Thai: Kluai

Available all year

If you think bananas are boring, think again. Thailand has hundreds of banana varieties each as exotic and surprising as fruits you’ve never heard of. Although most of us in the Western world are familiar with only one type of banana – the iconic Cavendish - there are actually several hundred varieties ranging in size from as small as my thumb to two feet long and in color from yellow to red to nearly blue.

In Thailand, the three most common bananas are Kluai Hom, Kluai Khai Tao, and Khluai Nam Wa. Less common but equally delicious is Kluai Nak, the red skinned banana. Even the wild banana, Kluai tani, can be found around, although you’re not likely to find them near villages or houses because many people believe the stands are haunted by a female ghost called Nang Tani. Some people tie colored cloth around the trunks of trees thought to be inhabited by the ghost. Wild banana trees are nearly inedible anyway because of the dense clusters of black, pepper-corn sized seeds. Watch your teeth, as these seeds are as hard as BBs.

Bananas grow everywhere in Thailand, but for the biggest selection head to Talat Kluai Khai (Banana Market) in Khampaeng Phet province. The province also throws a Banana Festival in October.
Kluai Hom
Gros Michel

Kluai Khai Tao
Turtle’s Egg Banana

Kluai Nok
Red Banana

Kluai Nam Wa
Sugar Banana

Kluay Leb Mue Nang
Lady Finger Banana

Kluai Tani
Wild Banana
Burmese Grape
*Baccaurea ramiflora*

Thai: Ma fai

April to August

Ma Fai is a small, slightly sour fruit native to Thailand. The thin rubbery skin splits easily to reveal three neat, half-translucent sections that are either white or purple. The purple are said to be sweeter. The flesh is firm and slightly fibrous, with a strange texture like a wet marshmallow that clings closely to the small seeds.

Ma Fai grows throughout Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and China, and India. They are a minor crop in Thailand, but can be found in the greatest quantities in the central region around Bangkok. They are typically eaten fresh, as a table fruit.
Canteloupe
*Cucumis melo* L.
Thai: *Cantalob*

Available All Year

Although many of us think of cantaloupes as a European fruit, scientists have traced their origin back to India. This means that probably the cantaloupe was naturalized to Thailand for hundreds of years before it made the crossing to Italy and Southern Europe.

The term “Cantalob” refers to a variety of melons in Thailand. Some have smooth, peachy flesh and orange insides, others are green on the inside with a bumpy, netted rind similar to a muskmelon.

In Thailand, cantaloupes are sold in wedges by Street vendors as a snack. They may also be blended into a milkshake or thin smoothie, or chopped and mixed with chile and salt.
Carambola or Star Fruit

Averrhoa carambola
Thai: Ma Feuang
All year, with peak October to December
Carambola (Star Fruit) is a juicy fruit with a delicate, citrusy, sweet and sour. They have waxy outer skin that ranges from pale yellow to orange depending on the variety. In Thai fueng means gear, and some have proposed that the fruit was given this name because when sliced crosswise its points look like a mechanical gear or a five-pointed star.

Star Fruit originated somewhere near Sri Lanka, but have been in Thailand for hundreds or thousands of years. Although they can be quite sweet, most star fruit in Thailand are somewhat dry and sour. The main variety grown in Thailand is called Fwang Tung, which stays pale yellow tinged with green when ripe. In Thailand, they tend to remain pale yellow tinged with green even when ripe.

Wait to eat the star fruit until the ridge along each of the five points have begun to dry and turn brown. In Thailand, the fruit is often eaten fresh with sugar and chile powder, or as a juice. It can also be made into a sweet ice tea with kaffir lime leaves. The juice of the really acidic ones can be used to polish rusted metal.

**WARNING** Star Fruit contains a neurotoxin called caramboxin which can cause intoxication, stroke and death among people with reduced kidney function.

Like grapefruit, star fruits also affect the way medications are metabolized.
Cassia or Golden Shower
*Cassia fistula*
Thai: Ratchaphruek or dok khoon
All year
Cassia, or Golden Shower Tree, is Thailand’s National Tree. The golden yellow blooms in March or April are believed to symbolize Thai royalty. The trees can almost always be found in parks and around memorials dedicated to members of the royal family.

The fruit is a byproduct of the blooms and is eaten only medicinally, although the flavor is akin to licorice and quite sweet. Each cylindrical pod is full of flat, tightly packed, poisonous seeds surrounded by a thick dark goo, which is the edible part. Eat with care, as Cassia is known to cause diarrhea.

Crack the pod in two with your hands and dig out one of the goo covered seeds. Suck the flesh off the seed, taking care as the seeds are poisonous. Although some find the fruit very tasty, be careful not to eat too much as it can cause intestinal discomfort and diarrhea.

Cassia is native to Thailand. It has many other relatives in Thailand such as *Cassia Javonica*, or the Rainbow Shower Tree, which has pink blossoms. It is grown throughout Thailand, particularly in the north and in the Isan region.
Cempedak

*Artocarpus integer*

Thai: Champada

Two seasons: June-July and September - October.

Cempedak is the sweeter, richer cousin of jackfruit. Although it looks similar to a jackfruit, cempedak is usually smaller, has smoother bumps and a longer, thinner shape. It also has noticeably less latex than a jackfruit.

The flesh of a cempedak is soft and fibrous and explodes with a creamy juice. It has a strong, earthy odor and it said it second only to durian as a smelly fruit. As Thai people are generally sensitive to strong odors, cempedak is not a particularly popular fruit. The immature fruit is sometimes used as vegetable in curries or deep fried into chips.

Cempedak is native to Southern Thailand and Malaysia and can be found growing in some of the National Parks, like Khao Nan National Park. It can also usually be found at the markets of Trat province in May or June.
Cherry Plum

Prunus cerasifera

Nang Phaya Suea Khron

Many people mistake these petite plums for cherries. When ripe, they turn a deep mahogany purple and are typically sweeter than most plums.

Like other plums, cherry plums put on a beautiful display of pink flowers every year. They’re planted in public parks and along throughways to bring a little color and cheer to the city. They grow mostly at higher elevations in the mountains around Chiang Mai, but can be found at markets in Bangkok during the summer season.
Coconut
*Cocos nucifera*

Thai: Maprao

September to December

It’s hard to imagine a tropical beach without a coconut lurking somewhere in the background, whether as the fragmented shade of a coconut palm or a cool drink by the pool. Thailand, with its hundreds of miles of beaches, has plenty of coconuts.

Coconuts are found everywhere in the tropics. Until a recent study used genetic markers, scientists couldn’t say for certain just where they originated. Now it’s clear that coconuts have been in Thailand for many thousands of years. It’s a key ingredient in Thai cuisine. The oil is used to cook with, the milk is used in curries, soups, and desserts, and the meat is shredded and sprinkled on everything from sweet potatoes to salad to rice pudding. *Ma prao haaao* refers to mature coconut meat.

There are over 30 varieties of coconut grown commercially in Thailand, each bred for a specific purpose. Some coconuts like Thai Tall produce good milk and oil. Sugar coconuts (*Maphrao Tan*) are bred for their sweet sap, which is distilled into sugar or a liquid beverage called toddy. It’s technically illegal to ferment the toddy into an alcohol, called *kachae* or *satho* in Thai, but people do it anyway. These coconuts are particularly plentiful in Chumphon, and include varieties like Pathio, Nam Hom, and Nam Wan. Nam Hom and Nam Wan also produce the delicious, extremely sweet white coconuts we find in most Asian grocery stores around the world.
You’ll probably also encounter the burned coconut while in Thailand. These are distinguishable from fresh coconuts as the husk is completely removed, not just shaved, leaving a smooth white, slightly lopsided ball. Thai people believe that heating the coconut condenses the sugars and enhances the flavor. They typically remove most of the husk, boil it for a while, and then place it on a fire for a final roasting.

Unfortunately, the price of coconuts in Thailand has increased in recent years due to a combination of drought and a beetle infestation, so you won’t find as many coconuts around as in years past.

Drinking

Watch a guy open a coconut with no tools – in the airport.

Five Best Ways to Open a Coconut
Durian

*Durio zibethinus*

Thai: Thurian

April to January, depending on the region.

Of all the fruits in Thailand, durian is King. Chief of exotic shock factor and sovereign over primally rich aromas, durian is the most bizarre and foreign feeling of all Southeast Asia’s fruits. The intimidating size, sharp thorns, and contradicting combination of sulphur and sugar sets the durian far, far outside the norms of fruit.

Durian is native to Southern Thailand and Malaysia, but has been planted as far north as Phrae province. By the 17th century, the main durian growing area shifted north to what is now the Bangkok metropolis. Later, the central growing region shifted again to where it is now: in the eastern provinces of Trat, Rayog, and Chanthaburi. Chanthaburi alone produces half of the durian in Thailand.

Since we’ve written a whole book about how to find the best durian in Thailand, there’s really not much else to say, except that it is delicious.
Few fruits are as visually exotic and enticing as the dragonfruit. From the curled wings of the red-ish pink exterior to the delicately speckled interior, dragonfruits are beautiful. Even the flowers of this cactus fruit are breathtaking. The showy white and or yellow flowers bloom only at night, giving rise to the moniker of “Moon Flowers”.

Originally from Central America, dragonfruits made the leap to Asia with the French colonials, who introduced it first to Vietnam. Of the three types of dragonfruit (white, red, and yellow) only the white and red are widely cultivated in Thailand.

Of the two, white dargonfruits are far more common despite being drier and less flavorful than the red. Both taste very mild, but the red is far superior in terms of juiciness, sweetness, and eye-appeal. It’s dark, brilliant magenta flesh easily stains fingers, lips, and clothes. More than two or three will even turn your urine a beautiful pink!

To get the sweetest dragonfruit, wait until the small “wings” have started to shrivel and dry and the skin can easily peel away from the flesh. To preserve your fingers, slice the fruit in half and scoop out with a spoon. The sweetest bite is in the center of the fruit, but the flavor will still be quite mild so for maximum flavor appreciation consume before other, sweeter fruits.
Gak

*Momordica cochinchinensis*
Thai: Fak Khao

December-January

Also called spiny bitter melon, gak is an oddball of the cucumber and melon family native to Southeast Asia. It grows to the size of a small cantaloupe and is slightly squishy to the touch when ripe. The inside is full of large dark seeds covered in a thin, bright red flesh. It tastes bland.

It is however considered something of a superfood in Asia. The bright red flesh is said to have up to 70 times more lycopene than tomatoes and to have 10 times the amount of beta-carotene as a carrot. The fleshy bits of the fruit are pureed with lime juice and sugar into a pleasant drink, sort of like a cross between papaya and tomato juice. It is also cooked with sticky rice to make a nice orange color.

It is most commonly cultivated in Vietnam but is rarely found around Thailand, particularly in the Bang Krachao district near Bangkok. It comes into season multiple times per year, but the main season is in December to January.
Gooseberry

*Phyllanthus emblica*
Thai: *ma yom*

Gooseberries are small, green or yellow fruits with a sour, astringent bite and a strangely sweet aftertaste. In India, they are believed to contain all 5 flavors and are used in Ayurvedic medicine.

Believed to have originated in Madagascar and been transported in prehistoric time to Southeast Asia, gooseberries are a minor crop in Thailand. They are mostly grown in backyards as a shade tree and for luck, as it is believed having one in front of the house will bring fame and success to the inhabitants. Some folk-sayings even say that gooseberries will straighten hair!

They are too sour to be eaten plain, but you’ll often see them floating in a jar of sugar water and chilie as a snack food.
Grapes

Vitis species
Thai: Aa-Ngoon
September to April
For many years, horticulturalists scoffed at the idea that a tropical country could make an industry out of grapes. They were wrong. Now Thailand is the center of an unlikely but burgeoning wine industry, as well as table grapes.

Grapes are one of the most recent fruit introductions to Thailand. Although the domestication of grapes dates back to 6,000 BC in Central Asia, they didn’t do well in Thailand’s warm climate. The earliest vineyards in Thailand weren’t planted until 1960s.

In the 1950’s researchers at Kasetsart University did extensive research on viticulture in the tropics, in the process selecting varieties suitable to the climate. The most common varieties now grown in Thailand are White Malaga and Cardinal, which were intended to be table grapes but have found a role in wine making. Other table grapes are Kyoho, Beauty Seedless, Early Muscat, and Carolina Black Rose.

As the wine industry in the Central Plains area took off, wine specific grapes were introduced as well, notably Chenin Blanc and Shiraz. Today the major regions of production are Ratchaburi, Samut Sakhon, and Nakhon Pathom.
Guava

*Psidium species*

Thai: *Farang*

All year, with two peaks: March – June and November– February

Guavas are one of the most popular snack foods in Thailand. They look like lumpy green apples with a thin waxy skin covering a thick layer of white or pink flesh encircling a pocket of jam-like seeds in the center. When ripe, the flesh is creamy and soft they have a beautiful aroma.

The name, farang, refers to a white person in the Thai language. It probably refers to the fact that the guava arrived with European traders, who brought it from Central America. It could also refer to the pearly white flesh of most guava varieties introduced to Thailand.

Almost all guavas in Thailand are white flesh. There are very few with pink, namely the Pijit 12-102. Other common white varieties are Klom Salee, Yensong, Pan Seethong, Khao Um-porn, Pan Yuk, and Nasuan.

Under ripe guavas are typically eaten pickled, canned, or fresh sliced with chile, salt, and crushed peanuts. When ripe, the soft, aromatic flesh can be eaten out of hand like an apple.
Jackfruit

*Artocarpus heterophyllus*
Thai: Kanoon
January to August
The enormous, bulbous fruits of a jackfruit hang on a scrawny tree that rarely looks up to the task of supporting the world’s largest fruit, but somehow does it anyway. There have been reports of jackfruits up to 80 kg, encasing enough bubblegum sweet, amber or yellow flesh to feed a village.

Jackfruits are thought to have originated somewhere in India, but spread into Thailand so long ago that they are essentially native. They grow everywhere from the very north of Chiang Mai to the south along the border of Malaysia – ranging in color from pale creamy white to deep, amber orange.

Jackfruits planted in the backyard are believed to clear life obstacles for the house inhabitants.

In Thailand, they can be categorized into two basic types: soft fleshed (*khanoon lamoud*) and crunchy or firm (*khanoon nang*). The latter is the only kind planted commercially and will probably the only kind you find while traveling in Thailand. Commercial varieties include Dang Rasimi’, ‘Golden Pillow’, ‘Chompa Grob’, ‘Malaysia’, ‘Mastura’, ‘NS1’, ‘J33’, ‘J31’, ‘J30’, and ‘J29’.

The fruit is eaten both raw and cooked into desserts. It’s usually sold already chopped into pieces or with the edible portions completely removed from the shell to avoid the thick, gooey latex. Immature jackfruits are often cooked as a vegetable, where it develops a stringy, chewy texture similar to shredded pork or beef. It’s a popular replacement for meat in vegetarian dishes.
Jamaican Cherry
*Muntingia calabura*

Thai: *Takob-farang*

April to June

The bright silver-red berries of this slender tree are so sweet they are reminiscent of something made with corn syrup, like Fruit Loops. Originally from South America, the Jamaican Cherry (also known as the Panama Cherry, Jam Fruit, or Strawberry Tree) now shades most urban streets and neighborhoods throughout Thailand and Cambodia.

They are not commercially cultivated and never sold at markets. They’re considered basically worthless, the foodstuffs of children. They’re a great snack to munch as you wander the city streets.
Jujube

Ziziphus mauritiana

Thai: Put-sa

August to February

The Indian Jujube, or Thai Apple, is the lesser known tropical cousin of the more common jujube found in Asian Grocers worldwide, the Chinese date (Z. jujube). Thai Apples are normally harvested when the skin is a brilliant, apple green and the flavor is crisp, starchy, and mildly sweet. As the fruit matures it develops brown spots, eventually turning a mahogany brown and then drying out and becoming wrinkled.

It is thought to have originated in India, but was brought to Thailand so long ago that it now grows wild in many parts of Thailand, particularly on the dry central plain. Today major areas of production are Samut Sakhon, Ratchaburi and Nakhon Pathom, where they grow two main varieties: Rien-thong and Bombay.

Look for fresh Thai Apples served with salt or sugar syrup and chilies, or pickled in brine. Once dry they are sometimes candied or made into a sweet, musty tea.
Longan

_Dimocarpus longan_

Thai: _Lam Yai_

June to September

Extremely sweet with a mild, musty funk, longan is the durian of the soapberry family. The cloudy translucent flesh and shiny black seed looks a bit like an eyeball, which is probably why its name is Chinese for “Dragon Eye.”

A close relative of the lychee, the longan originates in Southern China. They were brought to Thailand in the early 1800’s, and are now a major crop.

The brown shell is stiff and can be cracked open by squeezing between the fingers or the teeth, although pesticide use makes the latter unadvisable.

Around 70% of the longans grown in Thailand are of the Daw variety, which is the first to ripen in late May or early June. Another popular variety is Chomphoo, which ripens in mid-July or August and has slightly pink hued flesh. Other varieties to ask about are Biew Khiew, Haew, Dang, Baidum, Talub Nak, Phetsakon.
Langsat and Longkong

*Lansium domesticum* or *Lansium parasiticum* (same thing)

Thai names: *langsat* and *longkong*

June to October

Langsat and Longkong are two varieties of the same species that look very similar. The rubbery skin hides a firm, translucent flesh divided into sections like an orange with a bright, citrusy flavor reminiscent of a grapefruit. A thin white latex is released when the skin is punctured that can leave a mahogany brown stain on fingers and clothes.

Langsat and its cousins are native to Southeast Asia and can be found in slightly different forms throughout Malaysia and Indonesia, where it is called *duku*, and the Philippines, where it is called the *lanzon*. What differentiates these varieties is the size of the fruit, which can vary from a marble to a ping pong ball, the number of seeds, sweetness, and amount of latex.

The best variety is thought to be longkong, a variety that originated in Narathiwat Thailand about 200 years ago. Their thick skins and large size makes them easy to peel, they have few seeds, release almost no sap, and are very sweet. In contrast, longsats have a thinner skin but tend to be more sour and seedy. Uttaradit province and Ban Tanyongmat in Narathiwat are particularly known for their high quality longkongs.

The fruits are typically eaten fresh, although they are occasionally fermented into wine. Watch out for the small, emerald green seeds as they are extremely bitter.
Lychees
*Litchi chinensis*
(Thai: Lin Chee)
April to June

Sweet with a subtle hint of tartness, the juicy translucent flesh of a lychee is riddled with exotic undertones like jasmine, kaffir lime, coconut, and watermelon. The rosy pink skin is easy to peel but has a sandpaper texture that can make your fingers feel rough if you eat too many. Maybe because of its color, heart-shape, or sweet amicable flavor, in Thailand lychees are looked upon as a special gift between lovers.

Lychees are native along the rivers of Guangdong and Fujian in southern China, where the fruit was praised in Chinese prose as early as 1059 A.D. A small, sour wild lychees called *Si Raman* can sometimes be found in the forests of Chanthaburi and Trat, as well, but domesticated lychees weren’t introduced to Thailand until the Chinese traders and northern hill tribes simultaneous brought them in the early 18th century.


The hill tribes brought cold weather varieties, like Hong Huay, Kim Cheng, O Hio, and the bulbously large Charkraphat (shown above). Today over 90% of lychee production takes place in Northern Thailand, primarily in Chiang Rai, Chaing Mai, Phayao and Nan.
Mango

*Mangifera indica*
(Thai: Ma-muang)
November to June

Mangoes in Thailand are creamy, sweet, and aromatic. Most are low acid, with a floral flavor that lacks the tangy bite of mangoes in Australia or Central America. They are almost entirely fiberless.

There are over 100 species of mangoes in the world, and many of them are native to Thailand. However, the species that is normally cultivated, *Mangifera indica*, probably originated somewhere just east of Thailand, in Burma or western India. In any case, mangoes have been in Thailand for a long, long time.

Horticultural researchers have recorded around 170 varieties of mango in Thailand, but you'll only find less than 10 varieties in the markets. The most common variety is the Nam Dok Mai, but you'll also see Machanok, Kiaw Sa Woei, Ok Rhong, Raed, Pim Sian, Thong Dam, and Chok Anon (Miracle), which is popular because it fruits twice per year. Thais have believed that growing a mango tree on the south side of the house will bring prosperity to the family.

Green or unripe mango is an extremely popular snack in Thailand, cut into strips and dipped in salt and chili. Occasionally unripe mango is grated into strips and used in place of green papaya in Som Tom Salad. Sweet ripe mangoes are eaten either raw or sliced with sticky rice and a sweet coconut milk sauce.
The biggest mango plantings are in the north around Chiang Mai, which has a mango festival every year in June. Chachaoegnsao province, just west of Bangkok, holds a mango festival in April.

Nam Doc Mai

Mahachanok

Ok Rhong Thong
Mangosteen

*Garcinia mangostana*

Thai: Mungkoot

May to September

The Queen of the fruit world, mangosteen is often eaten with durian. It is believed in Chinese medicine that the mangosteen’s “cooling” powers help the body cope with the “heatiness” of durian.

The fruit is a deep, royal purple when ripe, but can be eaten when the skin is only magenta or wine red. It’s usually sliced and then twisted open to reveal the pearly white flesh, which is in sections similar to an orange. Six or seven sections is normal, but there can be as many as 9 sections. One seemingly wild variety in Borneo has only four.

Mangosteens are believed to be native to Thailand and Malaysia. You can still find some growing in the central forests of Malaysia. They don’t vary much in flavor or appearance because most the majority of mangosteen trees appear to be self-pollinating, meaning that the seedlings are more or less clones of the parent plant. This is possibly why there is only one other known variety of mangosteen out there, in the Sulu Islands.

In Thailand, mangosteens are primarily eaten fresh, but are also made into juice, syrup, or candies.
Marian Plum

*Bouea macrophylla* (Thai: ma-phang or ma-yong)

February to May

Also known as Plum Mango, this small fruit belongs in the same taxonomic family as the mango. It’s about the same size and color as an apricot, and can be quite juicy.

Originally from Sumatra and Java, marian plums are known by a host of names in the Indonesian language as well as Gandaria or Plum Mango in English. In Thailand they are eaten both ripe and sweet or underripe and sour with chilie sauce or as a pickle.

They are primarily grown in the Central plains area around Bangkok, particularly in Nakhon Nayok. Every February, there is a festival there to celebrate this fruit.

While writing this guide, we were startled to realize we have not yet tasted this fruit. There’s one for the hunt!

So that’s all we have to say (for now) about Marian Plums.
Nypa
*Nypa fruticans*
Thai: look-chak

Nypa is a palm tree that grows in the mangroves throughout Thailand and Southeast Asia. It lines the river and canals of Bangkok and produces an edible fruit that grows in clusters. Each hard, triangular nut has deep groves or ribs running across it. The fruit is typically picked when the nut inside is a soft translucent jelly, before it hardens.

The flower nectar can also be tapped to produce a sweet beverage called toddy, palm sugar, or alcohol. Some have considered it as a renewable source of ethanol. But that’s not the coolest thing about Nypa. Besides being the only palm adapted to the tidal stress of the mangrove biome, the trunks of nypa’s grow horizontally, under the ground. Occasionally when the tide shifts you can see them, weaving like muddy snakes just under the soil. The tall fronds we typically see are the leaves.
Papaya

*Carica Papaya*

Thai: Malakaw

All year, peaking May to October

Although papayas are not native to Thailand, they are so popular that it's hard to imagine Thailand without them. Most houses have a tree or two growing in the yard, and they are eaten at all stages of maturity cooked into curries, grated, or simply eaten fresh. What would Thailand be without a green papaya salad vendor on every street corner?

The most common variety of papaya is the Holland (pictured above), which originated in Malaysia. It is small, round papaya with a smooth, glowing orange skin. The Holland dominates the papaya market, and you may not even see the other types of papayas while staying in Thailand.

However, there are two other common papaya varieties: the Khaek Nual, and the Khaek Dam. Khaek Nual looks like an elongated version of the Holland, with an elongated tip and a rounded bottom. You'll never confuse it with the Khaek Dam, a striking green and orange striped papaya that maintains that beautiful contrast even when fully ripe.

As an interesting factoid, in the 1990's Biotech researchers collaborated with the research team in Hawaii who created the Hawaii GMO papaya. Thai researchers grew experimental plots of GMO Khaek Dam, which only ended in 2004 after genetic material was found on over 100 neighboring farms. GMOs are illegal to sell in Thailand, and all those papaya farms were destroyed. Bummer.
Palmyra Fruit
*Borassus flabellifer*

Thai: Tag-gola or Loogthan

This large black or purple fruit grows in bunches on a tall palm tree. It looks confusingly like a coconut, but is quite different. Inside the husk are three large seed arranged perpendicularly in a triangle around a core. When mature the seeds are white and crunchy like coconut meat. These are cooked as a starchy vegetable, pickled or canned.

The seeds are usually harvested immature, when still translucent and soft like jelly. These gelatinous disks are commonly served as a dessert with coconut milk or sugar syrup. They can sometimes be found as a topping option for Nam Kang Sai – a dessert made of shaved ice, coconut cream, and an assortment of candies and fruits.

Nectar from the young flowers is also collected to make a nutritious sugar called jiggery. The sweet liquid can also be drank as a beverage called toddy, or fermented into a yeasty alcoholic drink called palm wine or arak. Palmyra’s can be found throughout Southeast Asia, but are particularly common in the Isan part of Thailand.
Pineapple

*Ananas comosus*

Thai: Sapparot

All year

Sweet, golden pineapples are almost synonymous with a tropical vacation, especially when combined some coconut and something fermented. The fibrous yellow flesh surrounding the inedible core is composed of hundreds of small fruits that have coalesced into one big fruit, meaning that a pineapple is actually a berry. And they do have seeds (see how to collect them here)

Wild relatives of pineapple still grow in Brazil and Paraguay, where it was first domesticated. It was first introduced to Malaysia in 1888, but pineapple remained a very minor crop in Thailand until 1966 when the first large cannery was built. By 1971, Thailand was in the top 10 pineapple exporters in the world.

As of 2000, Thailand was the world leader in pineapple production, contributing 40% all the canned pineapples and pineapple juice in the world. In contrast to other major pineapple producing countries, 95% of pineapples grown in Thailand are produced by small farmers who own no more than 5 hectares of land and plant pineapples between rubber, coconut, or durian trees.

There are up to 27 varieties of Pineapple now grown in Thailand, divided into two families called Smooth Cayenne and Queen. Most large scale farms grow Smooth Cayenne varieties, while small scale farmers grow a number of varieties in the Queen group, which are sweet and aromatic. Prachuap Khiri Khan Chonburi, Rayong, Trat, Chacheongsao, Kanchanaburi, Phetchaburi and Ratchaburi.
Pomelo  
*Citrus grandis*

Thai: Som-oh

August to November

This ancient ancestor of the grapefruit is the largest citrus in the world. The very largest weighed in at over 10 lbs (4.858 kg)! Inside the thick rind, the pomelo looks like a leviathan version of a grapefruit, each section full of translucent white or pink cells with a sweet, slightly sour crunch. It’s a popular ingredient in a spicy salad with jicama or watercress. Ask for *yam som-o*.

It’s unclear just where pomelo originated, but is thought be somewhere around Northern Malaysia or Southern Thailand. Thailand certainly has the greatest genetic diversity.

Currently the main growing area of pomelos is in the provinces surrounding Bangkok, where multiple pomelo festivals take place every year. The Khao Pan variety, currently considered the best pomelo in Thailand, has a festival in its honor every September in Nakhon Pathom province. Another festival in Samut Songkhram celebrates the Khao Yai pomelo.

Other varieties to look for are Hom Bai Toey, Kao Lang Sat, Kao Phuang, and Khao Ruan Tia.

[How to Peel a Pomelo](#)
Pulasan

*Nephelium mutabile*

Thai: Ngoh-khonsan

Late April and May

Pulasan is a nubby, ping-pong ball sized fruit. Its shell has the consistency of damp Styrofoam, encasing an extremely juicy, translucent white ball so sweet it’s almost like concord grape juice.

Pulasans are a relative of the rambutan but are far less common. They are native to Southern Thailand and Malaysia, but are rarely found in the wild. Supposedly, some cultivars in Southern Thailand are seedless. They’re usually eaten fresh.
Rambutan
Thai: Ngoh

*Nephelium lappaceum*

April to October

Rambutans are one of the most popular fruits in Thailand and grow nearly everywhere. The ping-pong ball sized fruit are covered in a tangle of hair-like protrusions making them look like round sea urchins. Their name, Ngoh, means frizzy. The hairs are usually red, but can also be bright yellow. Inside the milky clear fruit covers a woody seed. They are usually very sweet, but vary a lot in juiciness. Some will make an instant mess, while others are crisp and dry.

Rambutans are native to Southern Thailand, where the biggest areas of production are. However they are so popular they now grow everywhere, even to a small degree in Chiang Mai. Si Sa Ket durian and rambutan festival and Surat Thani rambutan festival.

Common varieties are Rong Rian and Si Chomphu. A few others were developed by the Chanthaburi Horticultural Research Center, which named them Phlieu #1, 2, and 3.

Melanie and Tobias Show How To Eat Rambutan
**Rose Apple**

*Syzgium jambos*

Thai: Chomphu-nam dok ma

This small, round fruit in no way resembles an apple except that it is sort of round. It actually looks almost exactly like a small yellow guava. They are mostly hollow, and when ripe the seeds can be heard rattling around inside. The thin layer of flesh is mild but has a pungent, aromatic bite like rose water.

It’s unclear where exactly rose apples originated, but it is possible they came from Southern Thailand. It is eaten fresh, or used to make a rose water that is said to indistinguishable from water infused with rose petals. The fruit is not grown commercially and can be found only in small amounts at local markets or backyards.
Santol

*Sandoricum koetjape*

Thai: Ka-thon

April to August

Santol is a fuzzy yellow or light orange fruit about the size of a grapefruit. It has an extremely thick pithy area surrounding a soft sweet and sour center. Both the pith and the center are edible and are typically eaten with a salt and chili sauce. Sometimes the fruit is pickled in brine, or mashed in the pounded som tom salad. In the Isan, it is sometimes cooked with pork or added to curries.

Santol is believed to have originated in Cambodia and is most common in the Isan part of Thailand. Every there is a santol festival in the province of Lop Buri. There are many varieties of Santol, but some to look out for are Tep Ros, Peai Fai, E-la Tong Yib, Ta Chaum, Nim Nuan Mat Tuuam, Tong Ta Wee, Took Thong, and Tab Tim.

How to eat santol.
Snakefruit
Salacca species

Thai: Luk Rakam or Sala

April to June

Snakefruit, Salacca or Rakum Palm is the spiny fruit of a short palm tree. Each fruit is covered in a sheen of sharp, fringed scales that feel smooth when rubbed one way and painful when rubbed the other. The thin skin can be sharp, so watch your fingers.

There are 21 species of snakefruit, two of which are commonly grown in Thailand. Of the two, S. wallichiana is considered to be sweeter and generally better. The firm, creamy but juicy fruit sticks to a hard dark seed in the middle. In Thai this species is called Luk Rakam, and there are two common varieties: Sumalee and Nuen Wong.

The other species, S. zalacca, can range from sweet and crisp to astringent and hard. They are called Sala in Thai, and tend to be smaller, browner, and more elongated that the plump Luk Rakam.

In Thailand, snakefruit is often pickled with chilie or made into syrup to mix with milk (nom yen) or top shaved ice desserts (nam kaeng sai).
Sugar Apple and Custard Apples
*Annona squamosa*

April to September

Thai: Noi Na

Sugar apples are typically small, heart shaped fruits in the same family as cherimoya and atemoya. They range in color from green to nearly yellow to purple or red. *Noi na* means hand grenade in Thai, a reference to their appearance. When ripe, the rubbery scales easily part from, the white flesh, which is gummy, sometimes slightly grainy, riddled with seeds, and vanilla sweet.

Sugar Apples are believed to have originated in the West Indies, but had been distributed throughout Mexico and Central America by the time Columbus arrived. In the 1770’s it made the jump to Africa and India, where it is very common.

In Thailand there are two basic types of sugar apples: Green or purple-red. Common varieties are Nuathong, African Pride, B64, and L83 and Petch Pak Chong, the largest of the sugar apples in Thailand, which was first grown in Pak Chong, Nakhon Ratchasima District.

Because of the seeds, it is most often eaten fresh out of hand or pressed through a sieve to make a creamy juice, ice cream, or dessert pudding called *ta-ko noi na*. Grown mostly in Nakhon Ratchasima.
Tamarind

*Tamarindus indica*

Thai: Makham

All year

The long bean-like pods of a tamarind easily crack when squeezed revealing a thick brown paste covering shiny black seeds. Most are too sour to really enjoy fresh, and are instead the staple ingredient in curries and sauces like Pad Thai.

However Thailand specializes in one extremely sweet variety called Makham Wan. In Thailand, one extremely sweet variety called Makham Wan is worth eating plain. It is also blended with water to make a sweet, refreshing drink with a tang.

Tamarind originates in Africa and grows wild throughout Sudan, but was brought to Asia in prehistoric times. By the time Alexander the Great arrived in India around 400 BC, tamarind was wildly cultivated in India. In Thailand, tamarind grows primarily in the northern provinces, particularly in Loei and Petchaburi Province. There is a festival in Petchaburi in late January or February.
Tangerines

_Citrus Tangerina_

Thai: Som Jheen

All year

These petite, loose-skinned citrus fruits pack a sweet punch. They are extremely juicy and nearly fiberless. Their peels are tinged with green even when fully ripe, contrasting beautifully with the brilliant orange interiors.

Tangerines are most commonly sold as freshly squeezed juice at night markets or street stalls (som bangmot) throughout Thailand. You can find them being sold in giant bags at most large fruit markets, ready to be hauled away and juiced. They can be found year round, although the sweetness may vary depending on the time of year. If the vendor deems the juice not sweet enough, they may add a simple sugar syrup (nam chew-am) or a little bit of salt to bring out the flavor.

The most common juicing tangerine is a variety called Bangmot which actually originates within the city limits of Bangkok, over the river west of Thonburi. There you can find a giant tangerine sculpture at the junction between Rama II Road and Suk Sawat Road. Other varieties of tangerine are Shogun, Sai Nam Pung, and Keo-wan.

Another famous citrus is the golden orange of Nan province, Som Si Thong, which is similar to the Som Khiao Wan but because of the cooler temperatures in the north turns a beautiful golden color. A festival in December celebrates the Golden Orange.
Watermelon

Citrullus lanatus
Thai: Taeng-moh
All year

Deep pink, crisp and sweet, a slice of watermelon offer a much appreciated relief from the heat of a day in Thailand.

Watermelons can be found growing wild in southern Africa, where they are thought to have originated. But because of their refreshing, invigorating sweetness, they spread rapidly through Asia and Europe. By the 10th century AD, watermelons were being grown in China.

Today Thailand grows similar varieties of watermelon as other places, such as the Sugar Baby or a striped one called Jinthara. They grow best in dry, sandy loam and are commonly planted in inactive rice fields during the dry season. The Isan, with its long, dry summer grows the majority of durian, with the most watermelons to be found in Tak, Phayao, Sukhothai, Nakhon Ratchisima, and Ubon Ratchathani.
**Wax Apple**  
*Syzygium samarangense*  

(Thai: Chom-phuu)

All year, with peak in April to July

This crunchy, pear-shaped fruit goes by a confusing number of names. There are numerous species which look all too similar, as well English monikers like wax apple, water apple, mountain apple, java apple and jambu which can refer to any and all of the species. They range from deep, mahogany red to pale green with pink streaks.

Some varieties are dry and tasteless, others crisp and juicy with a hint of cinnamon and other autumnal aromatics. They are a common addition to salad or are eaten fresh with salt and chilie powder. They are common everywhere in Thailand.

The two most common varieties are *Thapthim Chan*, which is dark red, and *Thun Klao*, which is green. Other varieties are Phet Ban Plew, ‘Phet Sai Rung, Thun Klao, Phet Jin Da, Number One, Phet Sam Phran, Dang Indo, Phet Nam Pueng, and Thub Thim Chan.


http://www.actahort.org/books/773/773_22.htm
| More Fruit |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **Chomphuu Mamieow** | **Malay Apple** | **S. mallacensis** |
| **Sa-ke** | **Breadfruit** | **A. altilis** |
| **Khanun Sampalor** | **Marang** | **A. odoratissimus** |
| **Lamut Kamen** | **Canistel** | **P. campechiana**  | Sept/Dec |
| **Star Apple** | **Star Apple** | **C. caimito** |
| **Lamooot** | **Sapodilla** | **M. zapota** |
| **Mamuang Himapan** | **Cashew Apple** | **A. occidentale**  | March-April |
| **Mafai Jean** | **Wampee** | **C. lansium**  | May-July |
| **Thurian-thet** | **Soursop** | **A. muricata** |
| **Maphuut** | **Mundu or Rata** | **G. dulcis** |
| **Som-khaek** | **No English name** | **G. atrovirdis** |
| **Luk-nieng** | **Jering** | **A. jiringa**  | June/July, Feb/Mar |
| **Luk Yee** | **Velvet Tamarind** | **Dialium sp.**  | Aug/Sept |
| **Makok-farang** | **Ambarella** | **S. cytherea** |
| **Talig pling** | **Bilimbi** | **A. bilimbi** |
| **Som-saa** | **No English name** | **C. medica** |
| **Lang Khae** | **Tampoi** | **B. macrocarpa**  | June/July |
Awesome Resources

**Species Without Current Developmental Potential For Economic Uses**

*Encyclopedia of Fruit and Nuts*

*Underutilized Tropical Fruits by Suranant Subhadranandhu.*

**Bananas**

*The Ancient History of the Banana*

*Banana Cultivars Names and Synonyms*

**Cashew**

*Integrated Production Practices of Cashew in Thailand by Suwit Chaikiattivos*


[http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/ab777e/ab777e05.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/ab777e/ab777e05.htm)

[http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/ab777e/ab777e06.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/ab777e/ab777e06.htm)

[http://www.amjbot.org/content/91/5/760.long](http://www.amjbot.org/content/91/5/760.long)

**Coconut**


[http://www.lrrd.org/lrrd11/1/dali111.htm](http://www.lrrd.org/lrrd11/1/dali111.htm)

**Dragonfruit**


**Gak**

*Momordica genus in Asia - An Overview.* By L.K. Bharathi, K Joseph John

**Grape**

[http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/x6897e/x6897e0a.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/x6897e/x6897e0a.htm)

**Guava**

*Genetic and environmental variance components*

**Jackfruit**
Jackfruit by Ken Love

Longans

Cultivars of Main Longan Centers

Longkong

Identification of Longsat, Longkong, and Duku

Lychees
https://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/morton/lychee.html

Mango

Nypa

Papaya
Current status of papaya production in Thailand
In Search of the Perfect Papaya - Bangkok Post
Forbidden Fruit: The story of transgenetic papaya in Thailand

Pineapple
http://www.saico.co.th/localpineapple.php?PHPSESSID=69jvn53q6nphs6rot3ekc1ppd5
See a wild pineapple
http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/morton/pineapple.html

Pomelo
http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/morton/pummelo.html

Rambutan

Custard apple
https://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/morton/custard_apple.html
http://kucon.lib.ku.ac.th/Fulltext/KC4501053.pdf
Snakefruit


Tangerines:

https://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/morton/mandarin_orange.html

Watermelon

http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/ac145e/ac145e09.htm