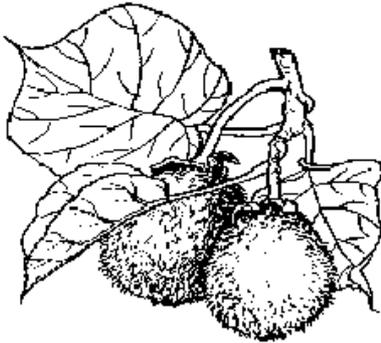


Kiwi fruit

Rich in Vitamin C, low in price and in plentiful supply in winter...



The kiwi fruit is a many-seeded berry fruit about the size of a large egg, furry and brown on the outside, bright green inside and with a pattern of black seeds radiating from a creamy white oval core. Talking about descriptive and humorous names, the Chinese peasants call it the 'golden hairy goat's testicles'; our New Zealand neighbours name it 'kiwi', in honour of their bird kiwi, whose brown furry coat resembles the skin of this fruit; the French call it 'vegetable mouse' (*souris vegetale*). The genus name *actinidia* alludes to the styles of the flowers that radiate like a wheel.

The plant originated in east Asia and was known to the inhabitants of the region since ancient times. Several species were found growing naturally on the edges of the Yangtze valley in China. However, it was first grown commercially on a large scale in New Zealand. It is a climber, previously known botanically as *A. chinensis*, now *A. deliciosa*, since there are significant differences between the original wild plant and the cultivated one.

It is more than a hundred years since the first seeds were taken from their native China to the countryside of New Zealand where the vines first fruited in 1910. All varieties of New Zealand kiwi fruit are believed to be descendents of those first vines. In the beginning, the common name of the fruit was Chinese gooseberry (though it is not related to the gooseberry). When New Zealand started to produce it commercially in the 1940s, the fruit became a familiar sight in greengrocer shops all over the world with the official trade name 'kiwi', and 'kiwi' it remains in the English speaking world today. New Zealand's success in the growing and marketing of this fruit didn't go unnoticed by the rest of the world; other temperate-zone countries such as Australia, France, Italy, Japan, South Africa, the USA and others, began to import and grow the vines with great success. However New Zealand is still the chief exporter.

Kiwi fruit will grow in all temperate parts of Australia. The plant requires a minimum of 500-700 hours below 7°C to form fruit. Where winter temperatures do not fall low enough, fruit may not form; extremely high summer temperature may also affect growth. To produce fruit, both a male and a female plant is required because only the females bear fruit. Male and female flowers grow on separate plants, but it is possible to buy plants that have a male and female grafted to the same plant. Male flowers produce pollen from the numerous stamens.

Female flowers have a well-developed ovary with long sticky stigmas in the centre; although they have stamens, they do not produce functional pollen. The male flower has a conspicuous tuft of pollen anthers, while the female flower shows the marble-shaped ovary that will develop into the fruit. When the plants are not in flower or fruiting, it is difficult to tell the male from the female. However, when in flower, they can be differentiated easily.

Kiwi flowers are quite fragrant. The leaves are large and heart-shaped. The fruit is delicious, refreshing, and rich in vitamin C. It is said that a single fruit is enough to satisfy the minimum daily requirement! It can be picked green and taken inside to ripen, and when soft to the touch, it is ready to eat.

When the 'nouvelle cuisine' came into vogue in the 1970s, the kiwi fruit quickly assumed a star role as an exotic, decorative ingredient in fruit salads and cakes. Bright green slices of kiwi fruit, together with red strawberries, make a 'picture perfect' on top of cheesecakes and pavlovas!

Why the Chinese did not perceive the possibilities of this fruit remains a mystery!



Female flower has white centre filaments
(made of styles fused at the base of the flower)
Male flower has tuft of pollen anthers