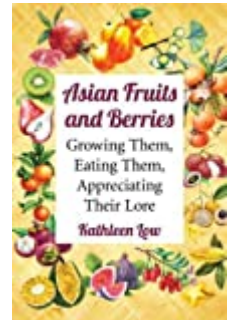


Kathleen Low. *Asian Fruits and Berries: Growing Them, Eating Them, Appreciating Their Lore.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2019. 234 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4766-7595-4.



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Asian Fruits and Berries is a guide for gardeners and small-scale fruit growers to fruits and berries of Asia. It is aimed at US audiences, as shown by references to where the fruit can be grown. However, it could be used worldwide. The book covers forty-two species or species-groups, from Asian pears and persimmons to wampee and yuzu. They range from fruit well known and widely grown in the West, such as mandarin orange, fig, and pomegranate, to little-known regional specialties such as Nanking cherry and pulasan. Citrus fruit are particularly well covered, with eight entries. Several species of *Syzygium* also rate chapters. Such famed fruits as the durian and jackfruit are described. Fruits so well known that they need no introduction in the United States, such as oranges, lemons, and limes, are not covered.

Many of the species are tropical, thus impossible to grow in the United States outside of Hawai'i, Florida, and extreme Southern California. However, global warming is rapidly moving the limits of these plants northward. Gardeners in states such as Arizona, Texas, and Georgia should know about

this book. Conversely, there is thin coverage of cold-weather plants. The wonderful sea buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) does not get a mention, nor do the diverse and interesting Siberian cranberries and huckleberries (*Vaccinium* and relatives).

Each account provides a good description of the fruit. Anyone interested in fruit, especially if writing general works, will be deeply grateful to the author for sorting out and updating the taxonomies of the plants. Species and scientific names have very often changed dramatically in recent years, thanks to advanced genetics, and all but the latest accounts are full of now-obsolete names and groupings. Students can now turn to this book for up-to-date information. One exception is the inclusion of king mandarins under *Citrus reticulata* (p. 158); they are actually complex hybrids of that species with pomelo (*C. grandis*).

Each chapter gives a short account of literary lore and folktales, a note on origins, and detailed instructions on how to select planting stock, grow

the tree or bush, and consume or process the fruit. These accounts provide full warnings of possible medical side effects. The core of the planting instructions is recycled in each chapter; it is a standard nursery account of how to plant a tree. Each species account provides additional instructions on the species in question, especially on growing plants from seed—information hard to find in most books. Instructions on consuming do not provide recipes, but provide all other needed information. Traditional medical uses of fruits are noted, with warnings that they are not scientifically proven and might be dangerous. The author is obviously very familiar with most of the fruits, though occasional statements that the taste “is described as” such-and-such may imply she has not tried the fruits in question.

Most of these sections are notably thorough, accurate, and useful, with two exceptions: first, the sections on “lore” are naturally rather short and sketchy; second, the sections on “history” are brief and often incomplete. They often provide only partial accounts of natural range. Sometimes accounts are shaky; the carambola “is believed to have originated in Sri Lanka and the Maluk [Molucca] Islands” (p. 40), a strangely disparate and narrow range for a plant found all over Southeast Asia and probably widely native there. The goji berry is “believed to have originated in the Ningxia Province of China” (p. 82); in fact this is true of one species (*Lycium barbarum*, source of much commercial material) but not of the much more common and widespread *L. chinensis*. Many histories start with the first known reference, or inferred first time in recorded history. This can be shaky. For instance, “the lychee dates back to 2000 BCE” (p. 148), which may be the time it entered Chinese consciousness but is certainly not the time of first reference, since no writing existed in East Asia at that time. Lychees actually enter history many centuries later. Other than these historical sections, errors are few. The only one that is striking and disruptive is a photograph of a blackberry

(*Rubus* sp.) mislabeled “che” (*Cudrania [Maclura] tricuspidata*; p. 49) in the section on that species.

As an ethnobiologist, I have encountered most of these trees in gardens and orchards in their home areas, and can confirm Low’s observations. As a small-scale fruit grower, I have grown eight of the species herein. I find the planting and care advice here to be very good. I personally would plant the trees a bit deeper in the ground, but this is a matter of taste and of adaptation to local conditions. I might also give more information about what will grow in very dry areas. Much of subtropical America (not only in the United States) is desert, and rainforest trees like durian simply wither and die. Desert plants like pomegranate and *Lycium barbarum* flourish.

In sum, this is a book for gardeners. Readers should look further into matters of history, but can rest content with the sections on growing and use. As such, it should encourage many more people to try these plants. Home orchards are a wonderful way to save money and eat healthier. They take much less care than annual gardens. Yet they have diminished drastically, at least in areas of the United States known to me. Those few who grow fruit trees grow the same old species, rarely experimenting, in contrast to the situation a century or even half-century ago. With global climate change, we need to expand our use of warm-weather crops, making this book even more valuable.

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