



Urban Harvest
Gardening for good.

Starfruit (Carambola)

Category:	Tropical
Hardiness:	Not cold tolerant; protect at 32° F
Fruit Family:	N/A
Light:	Light shade, partial shade, full sun
Size:	As pruned
Soil:	Moist, well-drained
Planting:	Spring, after danger of frost has passed



Starfruit (*Averrhoa carambola*) has crisp, very juicy, sweet yellow flesh. Every variety has a distinct taste. When fully ripe, the fruits have a sweet, citrus-like flavor that is both delicious and refreshing. They are eaten fresh out-of-hand or can be juiced. The fruit forms a perfect star shape when sliced crossways, so it is often used in fruit salads and as a garnish for avocado or seafood. They can also be cooked in curries, stews and puddings.

If you have tasted starfruit purchased at a market, it is probably one that was picked green in another state and sold here. Fully ripe starfruit is sweet, not sour or astringent!

Starfruit is an attractive ornamental tree with small delicate leaves. The tree can be kept in a 15-gallon pot or planted in a very well protected place. The tree can grow to 25 ft. but can easily be pruned to 6 ft. It is covered with tiny pinkish flowers in spring, early summer or fall, so it can fruit in all but cold months. The five-cornered (winged fruit) is yellow and has translucent flesh that is beginning to brown when ripe. The skin is very crisp and thin and is also eaten. The center of the fruit contains a few tiny edible seeds.

Care of Starfruit

Planting: Keep your newly purchased tree in its container until late March or early April. Bring it in if there is going to be a frost or freeze. The tree can be planted in the ground or transplanted to a larger pot; up to 15-gals. Plant it in a well-drained location using the unamended native soil only. Starfruit prefers partial shade but will tolerate full sun. The tree will try to fruit the first year. Pull off any fruits that form the first year in order to stimulate root development.

Pruning & Training: Starfruit seldom needs pruning unless you are trying to keep them small to suit a greenhouse or structure. They can be pruned to be less than 10' tall. Ripe fruit will fall when ready, so there is no need to prune for access.



Production: Starfruit are very, very productive and will start producing in one or two years after planting.

Watering: Starfruit needs moisture for best performance. This means regular watering during dry summer months and even in winter during dry spells if the soil isn't damp.

Fertilizing: In soils of low fertility young trees should receive light applications of organic fertilizer every 3 months until well established. Thereafter, they should receive one or two applications a year.

Harvesting: Fruit taste best when ripened on the tree. They are ripe when they turn yellow and begin to show brown streaks on some parts. Fruit falls to the ground when fully ripe. It can be picked a few days before when it easily separates from the tree, but they will probably retain a slight sour or astringent taste. Harvest early only if necessary to avoid damage from freezes. Fruits are delicate and are easily damaged – handle with care.

Pests: No serious pest issues have been noted.

Winter Protection: Starfruit is a very tender sub-tropical fruit that has poor tolerance for temperatures below 29°F - 30°F. An established specimen can tolerate brief exposure to light frosts such as the typical pre-dawn temperature dip. Starfruit can be planted in the ground near the Gulf and in the warmest areas of Houston. Plant it on the southwest side of a structure to provide protection from cold and north wind. When freezes are predicted, bank or insulate the bottom 2-feet of the trunk. If the top freezes, the tree will quickly re-grow from the protected trunk. Seedling starfruit have an advantage over grafted varieties because if they freeze to the ground, they will likely come back from their roots. In colder areas, starfruit should be planted in a large container so it can be brought in during freezes.