



## Rambutan

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**Name:** Rambutan *Nephelium lappaceum* (Sapindaceae).

**Origin:** A native of Malaysia and Indonesia.

**Distribution:** Primarily Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Vietnam, Burma, Sri Lanka, Central America, the Philippines, Hawaii and Madagascar also produce rambutan.

**Australian Distribution:** Rambutans thrive well in coastal regions in north Queensland (north of Ingham (18°50'S)) and around Darwin (12°2'S).

**Preferred Climate and Soil Type:** Rambutans prefer regions with high humidity, low evaporation, high year-round rainfall (over 2000 mm) and average minimum temperatures above 20°C. Maximum growth occurs with temperatures of around 30°C. Rambutans prefer a well-drained, deep loamy soil with pH around 5.5-6.5.

**Description:** Rambutan trees can reach heights of 15-25 m if not pruned but are usually maintained at heights of between 4-8 m for ease of harvesting. Rambutan trees have a straight trunk and a dense, usually spreading crown. Mature leaves are a dark green. There are three flower types – males, hermaphrodite functioning as males and hermaphrodite functioning as females and flowers are borne in terminal panicles. Fruit is ovoid, pinkish-red or yellow (dependent on variety) and has a thin leathery rind covered with soft, fleshy spinterns. Within is the white, juicy flesh surrounding a small seed.

**Varieties:** More than 50 varieties have been introduced from South East Asia of which around 15 are grown commercially. The main varieties grown in Australia include Jitlee, R156, R167 and R134.

**Culture:** After removal from fruit rambutan seed is washed and planted horizontally with seed germinating in around 10 days. Rambutan seedlings bear fruit in 5-6 years but the ratio of female to male trees is 4-5 to 7. Vegetative propagation is essential. Budding is the preferred method with budded trees flowering after three years.

**Pests and Diseases:** Birds are a major problem in northern Australia with rainbow lorikeets having the potential to cause catastrophic losses. Flying foxes are also a problem, primarily in northern Queensland.

Loopers can also be a problem as can beetles. Red-banded thrips can also be problematic. Flatids, mealy bugs and scales can also be potentially problematic.

There are some fungal infections of rambutan and both fruit rots as well as stem end rots can affect the fruit.

**Fruiting Season:** In the Northern Territory, rambutans tend to fruit from October through to Mid January while in northern Queensland, rambutans tend to fruit from late January until July.

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**Harvesting:** As rambutan is a non-climacteric fruit, it must be harvested when ripe with most fruit usually harvested 2-3 weeks after colour change. Harvesting is usually done early morning to avoid the high temperatures of daytime. Fruit is usually harvested using hand-held picking poles from the ground, although some growers are now using the mango harvesting aid

**Storage Conditions:** Immediately after harvesting rambutan should be transported to the packing shed and hydro-cooled using cool water and then placed into high humidity cool rooms at 8-10°C.

**Culinary Uses:** Rambutans are most commonly eaten out of hand. Peeled fruit are also canned in syrup and served as a dessert.