



# MANDARIN MELONBERRY

**JUST FRUITS & EXOTICS**

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## INTRODUCTION

Mandarin Melonberry (*Cudrania tricuspidata*) is a beautiful, small rounded tree with broad green olive leaves. It's also called Che or Chinese mulberry and is a member of the mulberry family. The tree flowers in mid spring and the fruit matures in mid summer. The fruit looks like a large, round raspberry, with a few seeds; the taste has a distinct cantaloupe-like flavor. Use fresh in fruit salad or eat out of hand. Mandarin Melonberry is one of the easiest, most problem-free fruits you can grow - a little care will go a long way with this tree. Female trees will fruit by themselves (ours did!). If you want to increase fruit yield you may want to add a male che later.

Two types of trees are available. We graft some trees onto Osage orange rootstock to ensure early, heavy fruit production without root suckering. Cutting-grown trees are also available - these will spread into a hedge, but root suckers will be thornless.

## USES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Mandarin melonberry grow to approximately 30 feet tall. Trees can be allowed to grow into large fruiting shade trees or pruned into a smaller bush. Use as a small specimen tree or mix in with apples, peaches and plums for months of fresh fruit.

## PLANTING AND CULTURE

### SITE SELECTION

Well-drained sandy soils are preferred, but mandarin melonberry will grow on many soil types if good drainage is provided. Trees do not tolerate flooding. Trees will grow more vigorously and produce more fruit in full sun. Because space is usually limited, savvy gardeners have planted the male and female che in the same hole. The male is kept pruned to about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the total canopy for adequate pollination and best fruit production (see below for pruning tips).

## **SOIL PREPARATION AND PLANTING**

Mandarin Melonberry prefers slightly acid soil (pH 6.0-6.5), but soils of up to moderate alkalinity are readily tolerated. If you are in doubt about the acidity of your soil, take a soil sample to the Cooperative Extension Agent in your county for a soil test.

Dig a planting hole at least twice as big as the pot and twice as deep. Enrich the planting hole with compost, aged manure or pine bark mixed with soil dug from the hole (50:50 mix). Grafted trees should be planted on 20-foot centers. Hedgerows are set 6 foot apart.

Remove the plant from the pot, gently loosen the root ball and place in the planting hole. The trees should be planted **at or slightly above** the same level at which it grew in its pot. Fill the planting hole with the mix of soil and organic matter; gently tamp it in. Water thoroughly to settle the roots and eliminate air pockets. Do NOT put fertilizer in the planting hole. Only apply fertilizer if it is the correct time of year (see Fertilization section below)

If desired, construct a water basin around the base of the tree approximately 36 inches in diameter. Mulch in spring and summer with approximately 4-6 inches of mulch.

## **FERTILIZATION**

We use and recommend the Espoma line of organic fertilizers. Espoma's Citrus Tone is a good choice for mandarin melonberry trees. When not available look for an organic mix that contains an analyst of 5-2-6. Make sure they contain iron, zinc, manganese, magnesium, molybdenum, copper and boron. These minor elements are very important to plants and most soils are low in these elements. Application rates vary according to type and age of plant, so read the instructions on the bag and fertilize accordingly. Be sure to spread the fertilizer evenly under the entire canopy of the plant avoiding a 2-inch area around the trunk. Water or rake in. For Zones 8a-10, fertilize 3 times each year in February, May and late July/early August. For plants further north (Zones 6-7), fertilize 2 times each year in March and June/July. Never fertilize after August (July in Zones 6-7) as this will promote new growth when the plant needs to go dormant.

## **WATER**

The first year is a critical time for the establishment of a new tree. Water thoroughly twice a week on light soils and once a week on clay soils. Soak the entire root system deeply. Mandarin melonberry should receive at least 1 inch of water each week for best growth and fruit production, but established trees are drought resistant.

## **PRUNING AND CARE**

Trees fruit on the current year's wood. Prune heavily in winter to encourage new growth for best fruit production. Remove approximately half the branches formed the previous year and head back remaining shoots by about half. If the male and female have been planted together, keep the male to about 25% of the total canopy. This may entail addition summer pruning of the male. The trees can be allowed to reach full height or kept smaller for ease of harvest. Mandarin melonberry appears to be free of pests and diseases.

## **HARVEST**

Fruit should be allowed to thoroughly ripen on the tree for best quality and flavor. You'll know the fruit is ripe when the stem doesn't bleed white sap after picking.