

Japanese Raisin Tree - Tasty Twigs!

Now wait one doggone minute - raisins don't grow on trees!! Well, yes, but really there is such a tree as the Raisin Tree - really, really!

While called the Japanese Raisin Tree (*Hovenia dulcis*), the Raisin Tree actually originated in China and was only introduced to the West in 1820. What makes the Raisin Tree unique is its fruit...only...it's not a fruit at all - it's the swollen flower stalks you eat!!



Japanese Raisin Tree photo by Rebekah D. Wallace, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org

After the clusters of fragrant, creamy white flowers bloom in mid June to early July, the flower stalks (peduncles) start to swell, become very knobby (Gnarly, Dude!) looking and turn a translucent reddish brown. The peduncles don't ripen until late in the season, early Fall or after a frost. While you can pick them off the tree, the peduncles are ripe and at their sweetest when they fall off the tree. You can eat the "fruit" fresh or use as a substitute for dried fruit in recipes. No dehydrating required as they dry on the tree. The peduncles have a sweet, crunchy, raisin-like or

pear-like flavor. Attached to the peduncles are round seed pods which aren't edible, though you can start another tree from the seeds.

The Raisin Tree is quite an attractive tree in the landscape as it naturally grows a single, straight trunk and "self-prunes" itself by dropping lower branches as it grows taller. The Raisin Tree will grow in light shade but it fruits best in full sun - 5 to 6 hours of afternoon sun.

While a moderate grower, 1-2ft a year, in time the Raisin Tree can grow to 30ft or more and with a spread of 25ft. It has no known pests or disease - yeah for us in the South! - and grows in a wide range of soils. Just avoid compacted or wet soils as it likes well drained, sandy loam best. Not much is known about its fertilizing needs so try fertilizing just once in spring with an all purpose fertilizer (10-10-10, etc). Though the Raisin Tree is drought tolerant, the quality of the "fruit" will suffer greatly without sufficient water. Water at least once a week in winter and 2-3 times in spring/summer.

Raisin Tree is self fertile and can start producing "fruit" as a 3-5 year old, but if the tree is started from seed it can take 7-10 years. Hardy to -10F, the Raisin Tree grows from Zone 6-10. If you want a fruit tree with a tasty twist, try the Japanese Raisin Tree!

