



# Harvest of the Month

# Pomegranate



## Social Sciences

The pomegranate is native to a region from modern-day Iran to Northern India. Pomegranates may have been domesticated as early as the fifth millennium B.C. and have been widely cultivated throughout the Middle East, India, and Mediterranean region for several millennia. Spanish colonists later introduced the fruit to the Caribbean and Americas. Pomegranates have been grown in California since they were first imported by Spanish mission priests. California grows over 90% of the pomegranates produced in the United States.



## Botany

The pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) is a shrub or small tree growing 16–33 ft. high, with multiple spiny branches. The flowers are traditionally bright red with 3–7 petals. Fruitless cultivars have been developed as landscape plants with even bigger flowers in different shades of red.

The fruit has a dry outer husk made up of two layers: a pericarp (hard outer layer) and a mesocarp (soft inner layer). The mesocarp has chambers called locules that contain the seeds. The edible part of the pomegranate is the arils, which are fleshy outgrowths of the seeds that contain juice. The arils can range in color from white to very dark red or purple.

Granada means pomegranate in Spanish.

## Nutrition

The most nutritious way to eat pomegranates is fresh. The arils are low in calories and fat, and high in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Fresh pressed 100% juice also has most of the benefits of pomegranates, but without the fiber. Pomegranate arils and juice are an excellent source of Vitamin C, Vitamin K, and folate. They are also rich in antioxidants, which can help your body fight off numerous diseases.

## Growing Tips:

To ripen fruit, pomegranate trees need sustained Summer heat; and the plants can't handle more than light frosts in the Winter. Other than that they are a very easy plant to grow.

## Care and Maintenance:

Plants can be grown as either shrubs or small trees. There are also dwarf varieties that can be grown in large containers. Pomegranates are very easy plants to care for; they require minimal pruning and can be quite drought tolerant once established (although for best fruit production they will need regular, deep watering throughout the Summer.)



## Harvesting:

Pomegranates are usually ready to harvest in late Fall or early Winter when they are fully ripe and have a deep red or reddish-purple color. They don't continue to ripen once removed from the tree, so make sure they are fully ripe before picking. The fruit can be stored for 4-6 months under refrigeration.

The fun part of eating pomegranates is getting to the arils. There are many tips and tricks to be found, and everyone will tell you their way is the best; but as long as your method works for you, then that's the best way! Have fun and enjoy this healthy seasonal fruit!

