



Bonnie Courter
Master Gardener

ASK A MASTER GARDENER GROWING POMEGRANATES IN DOUGLAS COUNTY

Question: I recently received a fruit basket that included a pomegranate. Having never tried them myself, I'm curious about them. Is it possible to grow them here in Douglas County and how do you eat them?

Answer: *Punica granatum* means "seeded apple" due to its large apple-shaped fruit filled with hundreds of bright red "seeds." These little fruit "seeds" are actually arils which are fleshy, juicy, brightly colored tissue covering the actual seed.

Animals and birds are attracted to these tasty arils which they consume which helps disperse the seeds. The sweetly tart juice from the arils make a delicious and nutritious snack high in potassium and vitamin C.

Pomegranates are one of the highest rated fruits in terms of antioxidants along with other dark-skinned fruits like grapes, blueberries, blackberries and raspberries.

Fruits are the size of large oranges with a leathery skin that turns from green to pink as it ripens and becomes deep red on some varieties. Other varietal colors can be pink, yellow, purple or mottled red-green.

Pomegranates originated in the arid regions of Iran to northern India. They were also cultivated in Greece and areas in the Mediterranean as Greek writers made reference to them several hundred years B.C. Spanish missionaries brought pomegranates to the New World around 1521, and they were

introduced to California in 1769 by early settlers.

Preferring a semi-arid to subtropical climate (hot summers and mild winters), pomegranates are suited to USDA Zones 8-10, successfully grown in areas of low rainfall and low humidity in the deserts of Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and commercial production is almost exclusively in California's San Joaquin Valley.

When exposed to cold gradually, however, the plants will harden off nicely, but they generally suffer damage below 12 degrees Fahrenheit. Since Douglas County has a zone between 7-8, it is possible to grow them here, but they will need to be protected from the cold much like growing citrus in this climate – planted in a protected area or in a container that can be brought indoors

for the winter.

They also need full sun and well drained, loamy soil.

Pomegranates naturally grow as a bushy shrub, but may be trained as a

small tree. After 15 years or so, vigor declines, but suckers readily grow from the base, extending the life of the plant. Branches are stiff and spiny, with glossy, lance-shaped

leaves. Flowers may be bright red, white or variegated with five to eight petals and a fleshy, tubular calyx. They are generally self-pollinating.

Annual applications of nitrogen will help maintain vigor. Once established, the pomegranates are very tolerant of drought. However, to produce quality fruit, regular irrigation is required with a deep watering every seven to 10 days during the growing season.

To keep the bush shape which is preferred by home gardeners, prune the tips of shoots the first two to three years to encourage more new shoots to form. Leave tips unpruned after that to promote fruiting.

The fruit is borne on the tips of branches, out in full sun. After five years or so, if it stops bearing fruit, remove the oldest shoots

all the way to the ground.

Harvest the fruit before it becomes overripe to avoid splitting. Rain will promote splitting especially if it occurs close to ripening stage. Pomegranate fruit can be stored for six to seven months if stored between 32-41 degrees Fahrenheit, and humidity kept around 80%.

Diseases are not a problem with pomegranates, but do occur if the fruit is cracked open. Fruit cracking can be prevented by providing regular irrigation. After periods of drought, pomegranates will take up water rapidly when made available which frequently splits the rind, exposing the arils. This makes them vulnerable to fungal spores and insects that feed on the juices and lay eggs inside the fruit.

If you're wondering how to eat a pomegranate, there are different methods to get to the delicious arils inside. Here's a suggested technique: slice off a piece of the skin on the stem end to create a flat surface; with a sharp knife ring the blossom end to remove a "cap" of the skin and expose the interior of the fruit; score the skin along each side of the segments and then pull the fruit apart to expose the seeds which are then easily removed from the supporting tissue.

The seeds can be readily consumed along with the arils, just as you would eat a blackberry with its seeds.

Enjoy this unique and tasty fruit, and maybe you'll be inspired to grow a pomegranate yourself.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461 or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service.



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Pomegranates are large apple-shaped fruits filled with hundreds of bright red seeds known as arils.

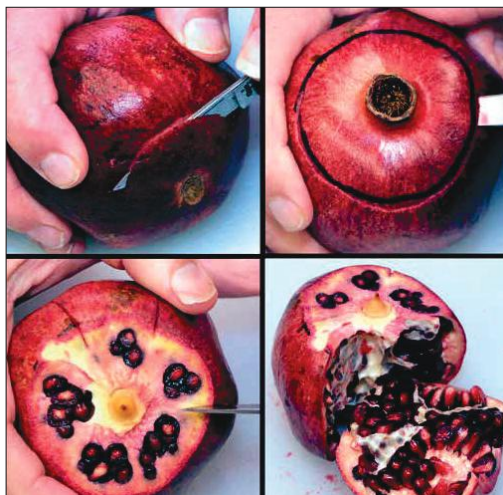


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Removing a cap of skin to expose the insides and scoring the sides to fully open the fruit is one of many methods used to eat a pomegranate.