

L.A. at Home

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The Global Garden: A drought-tolerant tree called moringa

November 29, 2011 | 12:21 pm



Moringa seems too good to be true: a fast-growing, drought-tolerant tree whose leaves, flowers, pods and seeds are not only edible but also highly nutritious. Called malongay by some gardeners, the plant (botanical name *Moringa oleifera*) has more potassium than bananas, more protein than sardines, more beta carotene than carrots. Seed cake, the residue after oil is extracted, can be used for water purification. Some also believe that moringa may help to control hypertension, keep glucose levels in check, fight bacteria and parasites and reduce inflammation. The seeds can have a Viagra-like effect, according to some. More important to gardeners (well, most gardeners), moringa is a nitrogen-fixer in the soil.



Pete Pableo, left, a member of the [Salad Bowl](#)

[Community Garden in Granada Hills](#), introduced me to the plant last summer. Pableo is from the Philippines, where the leaf is a staple, and he keeps his crop of moringa cut low to the ground, harvesting the fingernail-sized leaves regularly.

“You use it with chicken or soup,” he said. “Just the leaf. You have to use a lot, because the leaves are so small.”

In terms of taste, think spinach with a pleasing nuttiness, subtle yet distinctive, especially when added raw to a salad. In India, where the plant originated in the Himalayan foothills, the trees also are grown for their long seed pods, the “drumsticks” that give it the common name drumstick tree. You can eat the young pods like asparagus or green beans, pictured at top, or you can slice them for stew or curry.



The juicy seeds in larger pods can be used like peas. To sample a seed pod, check out the produce section of India Sweets and Spices in Los Feliz or other Indian grocery stores.

Rodney Perdew, right, founder of the online company [Moringa Farms](#), became enamored of the plant after reading a story in the L.A. Times in 2000. “I got moringa fever,” said Perdew, who started importing the dried leaf powder and seeds of the plant. (He also sells seedlings to Armstrong Garden Centers.) Eight years ago, he planted two seedlings – African and Indian varieties -- outside his apartment building in Van Nuys. Now, the trees are 25 feet high and festooned with seed pods, thick with feathery elliptical leaves. One tree shows a ragged tear where a midnight thief hurriedly tore off a branch.

Southern California isn't the ideal climate for moringa, he said. The heat is fine -- moringa can handle temperatures up to about 115 -- but frost can severely damage a tree. He planted his seedlings with a southern exposure and keeps them warm in winter.

In the tropics, moringa is easily propagated from cuttings, but here, seeds are more reliable. Look for seeds with the three wing-like flaps still intact. Wait till spring or early summer, soak them overnight and plant them in a perlite-peat moss mixture, keeping them dark and warm. A 10-inch seedling can become a 4-foot sapling in a few months, covered with edible leaves. The pods ripen in fall, just in time for Thanksgiving -- a drumstick that works as a side dish.

-- Jeff Spurrier

The Global Garden is our new weekly series profiling plants from around the world: the eccentric, the edible and, for our multicultural city, the endearing reminders of home. Look for a new installment every Tuesday; for an easy way to follow all our garden coverage, join our Facebook page for [gardening in the West](#).



Moringa foliage.



The silhouette of a moringa tree.



Dried moringa pods.



Moringa flower.

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Photos: Ann Summa

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18 comments

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Paul Baterna · University of Florida

I think that it's wonderful that a nutritional staple that has been around for thousands of years, is finally garnering attention in Western culture. I've been fortunate to grow up with moringa or malunggay (Filipino word for moringa) as a comfort food in Miami, and never realized what a superfood this miracle tree really is! Having access to this tree on our farm, I take for granted that

superfood this miracle tree really is! Having access to this tree on our farm, I take for granted that others haven't experienced this tree because it's mostly found in tropical climates. I think this tree is amazing! I've been obsessed lately in finding everything about the nutritional properties and benefits of consuming this plant in my everyday life. I've put together some information, third party research and studies, as well as some clippings on my blog- [http:// baternafarms.wordpress.com/](http://baternafarms.wordpress.com/)

Reply · 2 · Like · Follow Post · February 15 at 1:29am



DeeDee Shaw · [Subscribe](#) · Top Commenter · Success Coach at Real People with Real Results · 113 subscribers

Very cool that Moringa is beginning to be noticed for its worth. Not only do they not grow near as well in the states, they don't have near the nutrient density as the trees that grow in the desert, particularly southern India. Like many others here, I am thankful that Ken [Kenneth Brailsford](#) had the insight to research and study where it grows most nutrient dense, and then to harvest it in such a way as to maintain all the nutrition. Not only does it provide the best nutrition money can buy, but it is also the foundation for the best weight management system on the planet. Read more at www.realpeoplewithrealresults.com

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Darin Emily Hyden · Works at Zija International

We have little packs of Moringa in our kitchen we are able to drink in the form of Zija. All of our health ailments are now gone... aching joints, allergies, hotflashes, esophageal spasms, thinning hair, high cholesterol, blood sugar, etc. Awesome...

Reply · 2 · Like · Follow Post · December 1, 2011 at 5:09pm



Katie Hedges · Western Kentucky University

Thankful that Zija has created a completely absorbable supplement of Moringa oleifera that I can drink every day & share with others!!! www.katiehedges.myzijastory.com

Reply · 2 · Like · Follow Post · December 1, 2011 at 12:09pm



Growing Home · [Subscribe](#) · Head at The Growing Home

Great article. We have one moringa tree (aka drumstick) growing and its so easy to grow in Southern California. We can't wait till it fruits. In the meantime we have over 40 other fruit trees to feed us and our CSA members. <http://thegrowinghome.net>

Reply · 1 · Like · Follow Post · December 6, 2011 at 7:15pm



Anita Haubrich Poling · E. Kentucky

I have 6 little trees growing indoors for the winter in KY. I can pick about a small handful a week. I'm thankful that my Zija packs the power and I can use it daily!

Reply · 1 · Like · Follow Post · December 1, 2011 at 5:00pm



Glenda Ross · Co-Owner with Husband, Paul Baxter at GREENBRIAR FARM & NURSERY FOR EDIBLES

From East Tennessee: Anita, do you put the trees outside in the summer? I have several things in large containers that I drag into the garage during the winter. It has been such a warm winter, for the most part, we have small figs on our Celeste. Please keep me posted on how yours are doing in Kentucky. I am very interested. We have a small edible landscaping farm and nursery, Greenbriar Farm & Nursery for Edibles (on Facebook). Either through my personal or the Greenbriar Facebook, I would like to keep up with how yours are doing.

Reply · Like · January 29 at 6:01pm



Robert Corder · Monticello, Kentucky

Changing lives, to learn more please go to www.robertcorder.myzijastory.com Thank you.
Robert Corder

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Floyd Ted Shown Jr · Greeneville, Tennessee

I would like to offer good health to all my friends.

www.tshownjr.myxmstory.com

Reply · Like · Follow Post · December 1, 2011 at 4:47pm



Diane Philomena Robertson · Dept. Mgm Studies U.W.I. Senior Mgm Course.

An interesting article on a plant that has been in the Caribbean for ages...The glimmer of light has begun to shine on the miracles of this plant.

Reply · Like · Follow Post · November 30, 2011 at 10:08pm



JT Vaughn · Works at Cherokee Investment Partners

Glad to see the LA Times has picked-up on moringa! For more on moringa, please visit my blog: www.lamppostreports.com.

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