Starfruit (Carambola)

Starfruit has crisp, juicy, yellow flesh. Every variety has a distinct taste and each is excellently sweet. The fruits have a sweet citrus-like flavor that is both delicious and refreshing. They are eaten fresh and can be made into juice. The fruit is very attractive when sliced crosswise for a perfect star shape, and it is often used in fruit salads and as a garnish. It is an attractive ornamental tree with small delicate leaves that can be kept in a 15 gallon pot or planted in a well protected place. The tree can grow to 25 feet, but can easily be pruned to 6'; and is covered with tiny pinkish flowers in Spring, early Summer or Fall. The five-cornered or winged fruit is yellow when ripe and has translucent flesh. The skin is very crisp and thin and is also eaten. The center of the fruit contains a few small seeds.

Care of Starfruit Trees

**Cold tolerance:** The tree does best out of the wind in order to hold more flowers and to protect from freezes. It is classified as subtropical because **mature trees can tolerate temperatures as low as 27° F for short periods** of time with little damage.

Like many other subtropicals, young plants are more susceptible to frost, so they need to be protected from frosts and freezes by either taking inside or covering the plant with a blanket, and piling leaves or mulch high around the trunk. With frosts, they may lose leaves but will put them right back on in the spring. If they become too tall to cover and protect from frosts, prune to 6' and cover, or bring inside. The tree will try to fruit the first year. Pull off the fruit in order to stimulate root development.

**Care:** Keep in pot until late March or early April, and bring in if there is going to be a frost or freeze. Then the tree can be planted in the ground or transplanted to a larger pot (up to 15 gallons), if that is to be its home. Plant in well drained location using the existing soil only. The Carambola needs moisture for best performance. This means regular watering during the summer months and must be watered even in winter during dry spells. In soils of low fertility young trees should receive light applications of organic fertilizer every 3 months until well established. Thereafter, they should receive one or two applications a year Carambolas seldom need pruning. No serious diseases are known to be of sufficient importance to require control measures. Fruit best when ripened on the tree, but will ripen slowly if picked before fully ripe. Green or ripe fruits are easily damaged and must be handled with great care. Carambola prefer partial shade but will take full sun.
Production: Starfruit are very productive and will start producing in one or two years. They do well in 15 gallon containers as well as planted in the ground. They can be pruned to be less than 10’ tall.

Harvesting: Fruit falls to the ground when fully ripe. It can be picked a few days before when it easily can be pulled from the tree. Fruit can be eaten out-of-hand, sliced in salads, or as a garnish on avocado and seafood. They can also be cooked in curries, stews and puddings.

Varieties of Starfruit for the Houston Area Climate

Kari The heaviest producer of sweet, good-flavored and colored fruit. Fruit is about 6 inches long, thin, and borne in large clusters.

Sri Kembangan (Kembangan) Originated in Thailand. Elongated pointed fruit, 5 - 6 inches long. Bright yellow-orange skin and flesh. Juicy, firm flesh with few seeds. Flavor rich and sweet; excellent dessert quality. A heavy bearer of sweet, dark yellow fruit, also borne in large clusters on the branches.

Seedlings A seedling grown from excellent named varieties such as Arkin, Fwang Tung and Sri Kembangan. Crunchy like an apple, sweet and juicy. Firm flesh with few seeds. Bears December to March.