

Nispero

The fruit tree, known in Spain as Nispero, is actually the Loquat (*Eriobotrya Japonica*) of the Rosaceae family and indigenous to southeastern China, where it has been cultivated for over 1000 years.

It is an evergreen with long dark green slender leaves with a leathery texture. The plants usually flower in autumn and the fruit is ripe in April to May. The fruit is delicate and bruises easily so does not travel well. It is particularly popular with birds which is why the tree is often seen protected by a net as the fruit ripens.



The flowers are small and white with 5 petals and are produced in clusters of 3-10 flowers. They give a sweet heady scent.

The fruit can be oval, rounded or even pear-shaped typically oval in Spanish varieties with a slightly downy yellow to orange skin. The tangy yellow flesh becomes sweeter when the fruit is soft. Each fruit contains 3-5 large brown seeds.

The loquat is comparable with its distant relative, the apple, with a high sugar, acid and pectin content, making it a good fruit for jam, jelly and chutney. They are also delicious served poached in light syrup and makes a pleasant light wine.

Loquat syrup is used in Chinese medicine for soothing the throat and combined with other ingredients can soothe the digestive and respiratory systems.

The seeds and young leaves of the plant are slightly poisonous as they contain small amounts of cyanogenetic glycosides, which release cyanide when digested. However, the low concentration and bitter flavour normally prevents enough being eaten to do harm.

As the fruit is low in saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium and high in vitamin A, B6, potassium and manganese as well as dietary fibre it has many health benefits.

The kumquat, although bearing a similar name is not botanically related to the Loquat.