

Did You Know?



Medlar, *Mespilus germanica*

- The plant commonly known as medlar or common medlar is a large shrub or small tree in the Rosaceae family, which also includes fruits like apples, pears and roses hips.
- The white flowers in the spring and fall color make in an attractive landscape plant. It is considered slow growing and is hardy in zones 5-8.
- The fruit of the medlar is a small pome that is eaten fresh when “bled” or overripe. Bletting is a process of harvesting the fruit and allowing them to overripen in a controlled environment such as a cool cellar. It also happens naturally to fruit left on the tree until frost.
- The bletting process allows the starch to convert to fructose and reduces the acid and tannin levels, making the fruit soft and sweet.
- The bletted and cut open fruit are often described as having the consistency of applesauce and are eaten with a spoon.
- Medlars were popular in Roman and medieval times, widely grown in England and likely were in cultivation as long as 3,000 years ago.
- Medlar leaves, fruit, bark and wood have been used medicinally for a wide variety of ailments for centuries.
- The fruit is used to make jams, preserves and is added to desserts and cheese.
- There are many literature references to the medlar fruit. It was used as a symbol of prostitution or poverty in addition to the shape of the fruit.
- There are mentions in William Shakespeare’s plays *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It*, *Measure for Measure* and *Timon of Athens*.

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