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CORYNOCARPACEAE

Corynocarpus laevigatus karaka nut

Karaka nut or kopi (*Corynocarpus laevigatus* J.R. & G. Forst.) is one of only five species within the *Corynocarpaceae*, all of which are native to New Zealand, Australia, New Guinea and associated islands. While karaka is distributed throughout many low-lying coastal areas, it is often found in stands that were originally planted by the native New Zealand Maori people.

Karaka is evergreen and typically 8–9 m in height but can grow quite large, up to 12 m. The leaves are large (20 cm) and shiny, dark green.

While tolerant of a wide range of soil types, the soils

generally are moist. Karaka is tolerant of light shade but grows well in full sun.

The hermaphroditic flowers are small and insect pollinated. Masses of white flowers, borne in panicles of 100–200 flowers, open early in the spring. The orange-yellow, egg-shaped fruit are 3–4 cm long, produced in a cluster, and ripen from late summer into early winter.

Although the flesh and the seeds are consumed, the seed is highly poisonous if eaten raw. The fleshy portion of the fruit is edible raw and is sweet and pulpy, and often compared to apricot. The seed must be boiled and steamed, soaked for long periods of time under running water, or roasted before the poisonous karakin is destroyed or leached out of the seed. The Maori valued the seeds, which have a nutty flavour, more than the fruit and used the treated, ground seed as a flour for bread.

In addition to value as a food crop, the leaves were used to treat wounds and in ceremonies related to burial. The lightweight wood is brittle but was once used by the Maori for making canoes and as firewood. *Corynocarpus laevigatus* is considered an invasive weed in Hawaii.

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CUCURBITACEAE

Benincasa hispida wax gourd

Wax gourd, *Benincasa hispida* (Thunb.) Cogn. (*Cucurbitaceae*), is also known as winter melon, Chinese winter melon, Chinese preserving melon and ash gourd. Its origin can be traced to South-east Asia where it has been cultivated for at least 2000 years. The plant is a trailing vine with showy yellow flowers that develop into variously sized and shaped fruit. It is a very popular vegetable in China, India, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia. It is also found in areas outside Asia where people of Asian origin congregate. Wax gourd is named for the white wax covering on mature fruit which enhances long-term postharvest life, hence winter melon.

World production

There are no data on commercial production of wax gourd since most are grown on small plots and do not enter into international commerce. Tindall (1983) reports that yields up to 20 t/ha are obtained in northern India with individual mature fruit weighing 12–40 kg. Immature fruit yields are reported to be 18 t/ha for the hybrid cultivar 'Sapaithong' in Thailand (Kunz, 2002).

Uses and nutrition

Wax gourd fruit do not provide any special nutritional attributes (Table C.21). Sections of peeled immature fruit free from seeds and fibre may be stir fried, braised or steamed but are best used in highly seasoned soup (Kunz, 2002). Mature fruit may serve as a soup container (Plate 24) after removal of the central fibre and seeds; the rind may be artistically carved