

## Morinda citrifolia – Noni Tree

*Morinda citrifolia*, variously known as the Noni tree, Cheese fruit, Indian mulberry and a host of other names is an evergreen tropical, fruiting tree that has its cultivated origins lost in the mists of time. It has traditionally been used as a famine food and as a medicinal plant for a very wide range of conditions. The earliest recorded use of Noni is in the Sanskrit writings from India, but its true origins and initial use will probably never be accurately known. Suffice it to say that it now grows naturally or in cultivation in tropical locations world-wide.

*Morinda* is a genus of about 80 species, mostly of tropical origin and there are 7 species found in Australia. *Morinda citrifolia* is a large shrub to medium tree varying from between 3m and 12m in height with oval shaped leaves to about 30cm in length by 15cm in width. The white flowers occur in the leaf axils in clusters and occur mainly in Summer and Autumn. They are followed by fruits which fuse into a large compound structure as they ripen. The fruits are edible but have a very pungent aroma when ripe, apparently to attract fruit bats which are dispersal agents for the seeds. Fruit can range in size from 7 to 20cm. It is initially green turning to yellow and then white as it matures. Trees mature in about two years and a mature fruiting tree in good condition and suitable climate can fruit all year round and produce up to 8kg of fruit a year.

Seed retains viability for some 6 months from collection stored at room temperature.

### Propagation

Propagation may be carried out from both seeds or cuttings. Seed germinates readily after pre-treatment by scarification.

**PRETREATMENT** – Scarification involves thinning the seed wall to allow water penetration which together with high temperature is nature's germination trigger. Scarification can be carried out by soaking seed overnight in initially hot water or can be done manually in a number of ways. Seed can be rubbed in sandpaper between finger and thumb to thin the outer casing, it can be chipped by pulsing for a very short time in a blender or vitamiser with the blades blunted somewhat by sticky tape, or you can lightly clip the lower thinner end of each seed.

**TEMPERATURE** – Noni is a tropical species and as such germinates best at high temperatures – 35 to 38°C is ideal, but germination will occur at 25°C plus although germination may be slower and more erratic at lower temperatures.

**SOWING** – Sow seed in any well-draining propagation medium, either a soil mixture or an inert substance such as vermiculite or a peat/perlite mixture. Seed should be covered to about half the length of the seed. Water daily. Seed can be sown in either pots or raised seed beds, but good depth has to be allowed for the rapidly developing tap-root. 75 mm forestry tubes are ideal and pot on when the roots

reach the bottom of the tube. Seedlings benefit from regular feeding and fertilisation. Aliquid fertiliser is particularly effective. Transplant to final site once the plant forms a woody trunk and after the danger of frost has passed – normally at 9 to 12 months.

