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Monstera deliciosa

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Monstera deliciosa, commonly called the fruit salad plant, is a native of Mexico and Central America. It is a climber that under ideal conditions can reach to 9 m, with leaves up to 1 m wide. Its aerial roots cling to a support, or form a dense mat on the ground when unsupported.

LOCATION

M. deliciosa can withstand cold conditions provided it is sheltered from frost and cold winds and it tolerates a wide range of soil types. However, it prefers moist, warm situations and grows more rapidly in well drained soil rich in organic matter. It is especially suited for use as an ornamental on fences and tree stumps; its strong growth makes it unsuitable for planting alongside buildings.

PROPAGATION

The easiest method of propagation is to plant a twobud cutting directly into the permanent site. Alternatively, take a piece of stem 50-100 cm long and lay it horizontally in a shallow trench, leaving the top quarter bare of soil.

Seeds are occasionally produced but seedlings take a long time to develop fully. Potted plants are available from nurseries.

PLANTING AND CARING

Choose mild overcast weather for planting out potted plants. Place them at least as deep in the ground as they were in the pot, and ensure adequate watering until the plants are established and during periods of very hot dry weather.

Fruit can be expected after 2 or 3 years.

NUTRITION

Soluble fertilizers applied over the whole plant during the warmer months of the year will encourage establishment. Established plants generally require no fertilising.

HARVESTING

The elongated fruit is ready to harvest when the caps of the fruitlets at the base start to spread and show creamy colour between them, usually, about 12 months after flowering. When mature, the fruit can be broken off, leaving the flower stem.

After harvest, place the fruit in a paper bag in a warm position and in a day or so the green caps will fall from the ripened section at the base of the fruit and expose the edible portion beneath. Do not eat from the section where the caps have not been shed, for severe

irritation of the throat can be caused by oxalate and also by the small black scales between the edible segments within the fruit. Leave the unripe section in the paper bag until the next portion is ready to eat.

Alternatively, the whole fruit can be ripened for eating at one time by standing the base in water and keeping it in the dark for a few days.

PESTS AND DISEASES

There are no major pests or diseases of *M. deliciosa*.

DISCLAIMER

The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of review September 2002. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Agriculture or the user's independent adviser.