

# Durian

## Everything you ever wanted to know about the forbidden fruit

by Michael Moore

The durian, known as a *thurian* in Thai, shares traits with the forbidden fruit Eve offered the hapless Adam. It is something reason and common sense tell us to avoid, but its allure and sensual taste are often irresistible. Devotees lavish it with praise and wax long and loud about its rich creamy flavor. Those with less enthusiasm are often heaped with scorn and viewed as narrow minded wimps who miss out on one of life's great treats.

The durian, however, is unwelcome in hotels and banned by law from many public places. The source of its notoriety is easy to detect: *It stinks to high heaven*. And to make matters worse, the smell – often described like that of a civet cat – never seems to go away. The durian also isn't likely to win any beauty contests. It is round to oblong in shape and covered with spikes, making it look like something you might find dangling at the end of a gladiator's chain.

The nasty smell of the durian isn't a botanical accident – and if you think fresh durian smells bad, wait until you get a whiff of the rotten stuff. It's guaranteed to make anyone lose their lunch; but more importantly, it will spread for enormous distances through the thick growth of a rainforest. Although scientists argue about specifics, they seem to agree the stench of the rotting fruit attracts animals who then eat the fruit and swallow seeds. Later the undigested seeds, along with a supply of good fertilizer, are deposited elsewhere. This helps the durian spread and insures that it will survive.



Most types of durian are very large and sometimes weighing up to six kilos. The seeds are big and can't be swallowed by birds, nature's most frequent transporter of seeds. This means that the durian must have a smell appealing to reptiles and mammals, many of which also enjoy dining on rotten flesh. Many botanists speculate that this is behind the durian's especially putrid smell.

The scientific name of the durian is *Durio zibethinus*, a name that cleverly describes the fruit. Duri is a Malay/Indonesian word meaning spine and *zibethinus* is the scientific name for a civet cat. In other words, a durian is a spiny fruit that smells like a civet cat. There are over 100 different types of durian to be found in Thailand, but only three or four of them have significant commercial importance. The most prized of the lot is the *mon thong* (golden pillow), a specie that reaches six kilos in weight and possesses a gold colored flesh that is rich and sweet. Other commercial varieties include *kradum thong*, *chanee* and *puang manee*.

Durians aren't easy to grow and it takes about six years for a tree to mature to the point where it can produce marketable fruit. Although a tree can live to well over 100 years, they only are economical producers for about 25 years. Most trees produce about 50 fruit a year and it takes about 135 days for a fruit to reach maturity. In the wild, durian are available only between August and October, but commercial varieties are available all year round. The expensive *mon thong*, however, is available only between August and October.

The Thais have been eating and enjoying durian for centuries. Although the fruit originally grew wild in the southern part of the country, a Frenchman visiting Thailand described the farming of durian in the central part of the country in 1687. The migration of durian from the rainforests of the south to farms in the middle of Thailand coincided with improvements in farming techniques and the quality of strains available. The move also led to a tax of one-half baht per tree per year. In 1854 the tax was raised to one baht per tree, while the tax on mango, mangosteen and jackfruit trees was a quarter of a baht – a clear indication the durian has long been considered a luxury item. Today 75% of Thailand’s durians are grown in the eastern part of the country in Chanthaburi, Rayong, Trat and Prachinburi provinces. Significant amounts are also grown in the South, including the highly prized *mon thong* specie.

The Thais have done an excellent job of farming durians and their fruit is prized by the rest of the world. Fresh durian is exported in large quantities to Hong Kong and Taiwan. Frozen durian is sent in large amount to Australia, Hong Kong and the United States. Surprisingly, almost 50% of the frozen exports go to the United States, but this is probably because of the large number of Asians who live in the country. The percentage of the Thai durian crop that was exported rose from 3% in 1989 to 20% a short ten years later

Durians are transformed into a remarkable number of products. There are durian chips, cakes, candies, confections and a versatile flavoring powder used in making items like cookies and ice cream. Since durian is expensive, it is almost never wasted. At the time it is about to spoil, the fruit is slowly cooked until it forms a thick heavy paste that is then wrapped in a cellophane tube. These tubes, called “*thurian guan*” are available in Thai markets everywhere and in Asian markets around the world.

Ice cream is a great place to start eating durian. The flavor is mild, yet tasty, and the infamous odor is conspicuously missing. Neophytes also often enjoy the wide variety of confections and cakes made with durian. After getting familiar with these items, you’ll be ready for the real stuff. If you are like most Thais, you will soon find yourself a durian devotee. Once this happens, you will be able to loudly proclaim the fruit’s virtues and look askance at the wimps who have yet to try the stuff. Bon appetit!

<b>Components</b>	<b>Per 100gm edible portion</b>
Food energy	153.0 calories
Moisture	64.1 g
Protein	2.6 g

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Fat	3.4 g
Carbohydrate	27.9 g
Minerals	103.9 g
Beta-Carotene	140.0 mg
Vitamin B1	0.1 mg
Vitamin B2	0.13 mg
Vitamin C	23.2 mg