

Annona cherimola

Annonaceae

Ecuador, Peru

Common names: **Eng:** cherimola, cherimoya, custard apple; Swa: mtomoke mtopetope.

Ecology: A small tree growing at 800 m or higher in the Andes. The well-flavoured refreshing fruit was known to the ancient people of the area. It cannot tolerate a hot lowland climate and is grown commercially in Chile, Spain, USA and New Zealand. In East Africa the name "custard apple" has been used loosely for *Annona* species and hybrids. They grow best in cooler tropical uplands over 1,000 m, as in Lushoto, in sandy loam soils with a dry season. They tolerate lower temperatures for growth and fruiting than *A. squamosa*.

Uses: Food (fruit).

Description: A deciduous tree 3-10 m, often branched from the base. **LEAVES:** Alternate, light green, oval and pointed, sometimes narrow, 12-20 cm long with few hairs above but characteristic **golden-brown hairs below**. (Young leaves and veins on mature leaves.) **FLOWERS:** fragrant, usually solitary (or 2-3) hang down on short hairy stalks, 3 outside **petals narrow to 3 cm, pale yellow** with a purple spot at the base, 3 inner petals red-purple, tiny. **FRUIT: Green and compound, 8-15 cm across**, variable, heart-shaped, round or oval with regular **overlapping fleshy scales** or the surface patterned with U-shaped depressions, spirally arranged like fingerprints. The ripe soft flesh is **cream-white, granular**, acid-sweet, easily separated from numerous seeds, each one brown, about 1.5 cm long.

Propagation: All *Annonas* can be grown from seed and cuttings, but budding and grafting are more successful—with *A. cherimoya* or *A. squamosa* as rootstock.

Seed info.: Similar to *A. squamosa*.

treatment:

storage:

Management: Small beetles usually pollinate the flowers. Hand pollination improves fruit set and the fruit ripens 4-5 months later.

Remarks: Green fruit, seed and leaves of *Annona* spp. are reported to have insecticidal properties. Fruit and seed are effective against worms. Fruit are eaten fresh and the pulp can be used to flavour ice cream. The hybrids between *A. cherimola* and *A. squamosa* are known as atemoya or custard apple and are grown all over Africa and the sub-tropics. The word "annonna" means yearly production and indicates a good annual yield of fruit.

