

## ***THE JAPANESE QUINCE***

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The Japanese quince is the first fruit bush which showed up in my yard after I bought my last home. The quince, or *Cydonia Oblonga*, originated in the Caucasus, a mountainous area between the Black and Caspian seas. It belongs to the genus *Cydonia*, is of the order Rosales and the same family as the rose, Rosaceae. Formerly, there were four species in the genus of *Cydonia* but now the quince is treated in a separate genera. Its original name “supurgillu” is of Arabic nature, but the quince has then taken its modern name from an old French word, coin, which in the plural form is quins.

It is believed that the harvesting of the quince may have originated before the apple. Numerous references are made throughout history to the golden quince. For example, it was often offered as a ritual at Greek weddings. Apparently a bride was to bite into a golden quince before the wedding ceremony so her kisses would be sweeter. Old roman cookbooks, mainly “Apicus” (compiled in the 4th or 5th century) offer recipes for quinces to be served with honey and, strangely enough, mixed with leeks.

The common quince is a tree whose fruit is cultivated mainly in Asia and the Mediterranean area. The most common known to us in North America is the Japanese quince whose genus is *Chaenomeles laginaria*. It is used mainly for medicinal purpose, as the fruit is hard and very bitter. Very often it is simply used here as an ornamental tree. Most varieties of quinces are not eaten raw, as the fruit is often too sour, but are used to make jams and jellies. The fruit however does become sweeter after it has been bletted (after the first frost). Because of its strong flavor, the quince is sometimes added to other dishes. In many South American countries, it is eaten with cheese in sandwiches. In France and some regions of Switzerland, liqueur is made out of the quince and used as a “digestif” after a meal.

In order for quinces to ripen, the fruit requires hot summers and in order to produce flowers, cool periods below 7 degrees celsius. Quince trees are also used as a rootstock for grafting plants, mainly pear trees. As far as the medicinal values are concerned, the dried pit of the fruit can cure sore throats and coughs. In Iran, the seeds of the quince are used to fight pneumonia. Quince is also used as a moisturizer and day cream for the prevention of wrinkles.

The fruit can vary from 4 cm diameter to 8 cm and weigh from 50 grams to 180 grams depending on the variety. The fruit growing on the Japanese quince in my back yard are small, but the ones my husband's grandparents harvested in Romania were almost the size of a small fist. The fruit contains between 80 and 120 seeds. Most fruits usually ripen after August and develop a yellowish color from its original olive green brown. The quince is extremely high in vitamin C (more than lemons) and fibre. In order to propagate, the seeds of the quince cannot dry off before being stratified. Propagation can also be done by grafting or hard and soft wood cutting.

There are several pests that can hinder the growth of the quince. They are Monilinia, leaf spots, grey mold, and fire flight bacteria, along with rootknot nematodes. The latest can cause up to 5% of crop loss each year. The quince should be pruned to maintain its health and beauty. All dead branches or diseased branches should be cut to their point of origin. Pruning can be done at any time of the year but it is best during late winter or early spring.