



Golden fruits and white scented flowers

## Kumquat

Kumquat is a fruit resembling a miniature orange. Until 1915, the plant was put in the genus *Citrus* (same as orange, lemon, grapefruit) but has now been given a genus of its own – *Fortunella* – in honour of the plant explorer Robert Fortune, who first discovered it in China during the 19th century.

Kumquat trees are small, seldom exceeding shrub size, they have dark green foliage and – like their relatives the citrus – scented white flowers. The tiny fruits can remain hanging on the branches for a long time, making the plant extremely attractive as a landscape plant, both in the garden and in patio containers. Some kumquats are sweet enough to eat skin and all, but others do need a bit of sweetening. The tiny orange-like looking fruit, roughly 2-3cm across, can be round, such as the Marumi kumquat (*Fortunella japonica*), or the oval shape Nagami kumquat (*Fortunella margarita*). The peel colour is generally orange, but can also be yellow to reddish, sometimes variegated. A variety often sold as a kumquat is Calamondin (*Citrus madurensis*), some nurseries sell this with a tag ‘Kumquat Calamondin’, but it is not botanically a true kumquat. Most of the small, round, orange fruits that backyard gardeners commonly call kumquats are usually calamondins. These plants are likely to be a naturally occurring hybrid between a sour mandarin and a kumquat, and are grown primarily as ornamentals, though the fruits can be used to make a flavoursome marmalade. It has been suggested that the calamondin may be a hybrid of a sour mandarin and a nagami kumquat, which is why the two fruits are so similar at first glance. To determine whether your tree is bearing kumquats or calamondins, slice a fruit open to count the segments. Calamondins have 8 to 12 segments, while kumquats have less, only 4 to 6 or 7. Generally, calamondins peel like a mandarin or an orange but if you’ve got a true kumquat, you actually can’t peel it, you eat the whole fruit, skin and all, just like a grape!

No need to peel a true kumquat



Nagami, the most popular cultivar of kumquat, is oval in shape and has deep-orange fruit with 1-4 seeds per fruit. Hybrid Meiwa is larger, has a sweeter pulp and juice, and is nearly seedless. Marumi is round and orange-like. Centennial Variegated is a compact form with leaves and fruits both variegated, and both ripe orange-coloured fruit and green-coloured fruit can appear on the tree at the same time.

What’s in a name?

You say kumquat, I say calamondin. You spell kumquat, I spell cumquat. Who’d have thought that the smallest member of the citrus family could generate such confusion? Both spellings are acceptable, with cumquat being of British origin and kumquat with an exotic touch. The common name kumquat is nothing more than the anglicised spelling of the Cantonese term for the fruit – gam gwat (golden mandarin). As much as I appreciate botanical naming conventions, the truth which we gardeners sometimes face is that names can get in the way of our enjoyment of plants. After all is said and done, it doesn't really matter if you call your kumquat a calamondin or vice versa. You just want to take good care of your tree, enjoy its glossy green foliage, white fragrant flowers and brightly coloured fruits.

Take care of the tree: Kumquat trees are normally grown through grafting, usually onto the rootstock of oranges and grapefruits (though seed germination is possible). The trees are self-fertile, you will only need one to produce fruit. To prune grafted trees, cut away any suckers sprouting below the graft bud, as these will not produce fruit. Kumquats need a lot of sun, they are adaptable to a wide range of climates and mature plants are quite cold tolerant. They make good container plants; however, they do not like to be rootbound so it is a good idea to repot them every few years.

Enjoy the fruits: How about kumquat marmalade on toast for breakfast? Need to add some zest to a luncheon salad? Just slice a kumquat – preferably a seedless one – into thin rounds and toss them in. Need to add piquancy to fatty braised pork or duck for dinner? Drop whole fruits in during the last stage of cooking. Need an easy dessert? Simmer the fruits in sugar syrup until translucent, add a dash of brandy – delicious served with ice cream!