

Lychee

GWF455
Updated Jan 09

This plant sprouts easily from seed, but it is quite tricky to grow.

Lychees are beautiful, graceful, oriental plants with glossy, pointy leaves. In the spring they have very colourful red and orange new growth. Lychees are unlikely to produce any fruit in this country, but they are worth growing because they are so attractive. They germinate easily, but require careful attention as they grow.

How to grow a lychee

Either eat the lychee and spit out the pip, or carefully cut the fruit open and remove the pip with a spoon. There is usually only one pip per fruit, and you can buy the fruits at any time of year.

You will need a pot measuring about 8cm across, with enough holes in the bottom to let water drain out. Fill your pot with multi-purpose compost and water it very well so that water starts to drip out.

Sow between four and five lychee pips in each pot. You won't need more because they will grow easily from the seeds. Cover the pips with 1cm of compost and water again.

Put the pot in a see-through plastic food bag and tie the ends together, to keep all the moisture in the compost and stop the pips from drying out.

Put the pot in the dark, in a very warm place; a heated airing cupboard is ideal.

The pips will take about two weeks to grow, but you will need to check them every day or so to see if they have started sprouting. If the compost looks dry, make sure you add a little water.

When the pips are sprouting, remove the plastic bag and put the pot on a shady windowsill. Once the seedlings have three or four leaves, pot them into separate pots. Use some more of the same compost you sowed them in. Lychee seedlings are sensitive to bright light so they should be grown on a shady windowsill for a few weeks.

Caring for your lychee

After three or four weeks on a shady windowsill, you can move your lychee plants to a brighter place, but you need to keep them away from direct sunlight. The plants will eventually grow on into little bushes.

Lychees like to be kept moist all the time so you may need to water them every day, and you must make sure they never dry out. During the summer,

feed your plants with a general house-plant fertiliser. A regular feed every two weeks should help to keep the plants strong.

As your lychee plants grow, they will need to be repotted at regular intervals. You can tell when your plants need repotting because you will see roots growing out of the holes in the bottom of the pot.

