

Actinidia - Care Guide

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Chinese gooseberries, Kiwi fruit

Actinidia are vigorous, and normally hardy, twining climbers with alternate, simple, leaves that inhabit shrubby woodland areas of East Asia.

Examples of the species offered by Burncoose can be found growing on the walls in the main walled garden of the nursery. Actinidia are ideal for growing in this way where they can display their (occasionally variegated) foliage and fruits to best effect. They can however also be left to roam up through other evergreen shrubs as they would in the wild. Those species which produce edible fruits are best grown as adjacent (or even intertwined) pairs of male and female plants so that cross fertilisation and a good crop is produced.

A. arguta 'Issai' is self-fertile and grows in full sun in the nursery where it has formed a dense clump against a south facing wall. It is 12-15ft in height and the 'clump' at the top of the plant has been pruned over the years to keep it under control. The white flowers open in June and July and are followed by rounded greenish-yellow fruits of less than an inch in size. This is a fully hardy deciduous climber but the fruit is not that special.

A. deliciosa is the Chinese gooseberry or kiwi fruit. It is even more vigorous than *A. arguta* and will need firm annual pruning, once established, to keep it under control. The leaves are heart shaped and up to 8in long and clusters of creamy-white then yellow appear in early summer. Female plants (*A. deliciosa* 'Hayward') produce bristle skinned 3in long ovoid fruits in September or October although these are often not ripe enough to pick and eat until the leaves are about to drop. Only after a really warm summer do our nursery stock plants produce sizeable fruit which are juicy and edible. The supermarket shelves may contain near perfect kiwi fruit year round but your garden will seldom give you this luxury unless, perhaps, you try to grow male and female kiwi fruit under

glass. You will need plenty of room but kiwis produce flowers and fruit on the mature wood rather than the seasonal new growths.

A. kolomikta – the variegated kiwi is also a vigorous climber but, with us, only grows to 8-12ft and, as such, requires less pruning or containing than the other species. The plant is grown for its attractive irregular three-colour variegated leaves which are at their best in early summer. The top half of the leaf is white flushed with pink but, you do not usually see this properly on young plants, while still in their pots. The flowers open in June and are white with some scent. Most of the plants in UK cultivation seem to be male and our stock plant has never produced fruit.

A. pilosula (now renamed as *A. tetramera* var. *maloides*) is also grown as an ornamental foliage plant. Its opening green leaves have a silvery white blotch at the top which can, initially, cover up to half of some of the leaves. With us this species grows to around 10ft in height and only needs occasional pruning once established and secured onto wires or trellis on a wall. Pink bell flowers appear in the spring and this species does not set fruit in our climate.

All *Actinidia* are best propagated from semi-ripe new growth cuttings in late summer. Pruning is best undertaken during winter dormancy and fruiting varieties are best grown in the hottest and most protected location on your wall or fence.

Burncoose Nurseries: Gwennap, Redruth, Cornwall TR16 6BJ

Telephone: +44 (0) 1209 860316 Fax: +44 (0) 1209 860011 Email: info@burncoose.co.uk

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