BURNCOOSE NURSERIES PART OF THE CAERHAYS ESTATE

Ziziphus sativa - Care Guide

Caring For Ziziphus Sativa

These are non-native trees, originally from Asia, but cultivated widely by the Romans around the Mediterranean for their fruits. In the middle ages the fruits were imported to England for medicinal purposes from Provence as a perceived cure for coughs and sore throats.

Ziziphus sativa is a small deciduous tree growing up to 30ft with spiny branches. The spines appear in pairs and the leaves are alternate with an oval shape. The flowers are yellowish in groups of two or three on short stalks in the leaf axils. The fruits are egg shaped, fleshy and about half to one inch long; dark red then almost black when ripe in late summer.

The reference books say that while this tree is perfectly hardy in English gardens it seldom sets any fruits. This has certainly been our experience at Caerhays where a plant has grown to about 10ft in as many years without fruiting. It does produce a set of flowers in May which look greenish from a distance amid the attractive light green new leaves. Despite the spines the bark in winter has a smooth darkish slivery hue which is easily recognisable.

After the 2018 summer heatwave there may perhaps be more chance of a real crop of fruit. The problem is that our summers are not normally hot enough to encourage the fruiting on this plant which you see so abundantly, and in many different fruiting forms, in Italy.

The fruits have an acid taste when fresh but are more commonly dried and then eaten.

This tree however remains a peculiarity in the UK which is grown only by those wanting to create an unusual fruit garden or to confuse tree experts.

Perhaps global warming may make it more popular in gardens here but, as it is so slow growing, it is advisable to start early in anticipation!



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