AGRI MAGAZINE
(International E-Magazine for Agricultural Articles)
Volume: 01, Issue: 05 (December, 2024)
Available online at http://www.agrimagazine.in

Scientific Cultivation of Dragon Fruit

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Dragon fruit, referred to as Pitaya or Hylocereus spp., is a tropical and subtropical fruit that has gained preference because of its appearance, nutritional value, and hardiness in arid and semi-arid climates. Scientific cultivation entails modern techniques with the aim of increased yield, better quality fruits, and efficiency in costs. The key elements in growing the fruit are discussed as follows:

1. Climate and Environmental Requirements

Temperature: Ideal temperature ranges between 20°C to 30°C.

Rainfall: Requires 500–1500 mm annual rainfall with well-distributed irrigation in dry periods.

Light: Requires 6–8 hours of sunlight daily

Tolerance to Adaptation: Tolerant of tropical and subtropical regions; drought hardy once established.

2. Soil Requirement

Soil: Likes a well-drained sandy loam or clay loam soil

pH: The ideal soil pH ranges from 5.5 to 7.0

Preparation: Add organic matter for fertility. compost/farmyard manure; Avoid waterlogged situations.

3. Methods of Propagation

Cuttings: The most common method; select healthy, mature cuttings (30–50 cm long).

Seeds: Used mainly for research or breeding purposes as it takes longer for fruiting.

Grafting: Rarely used but can improve plant vigor and disease resistance.

4. Planting and Trellis System

Planting Time: Best planted during the monsoon season (June–July).

Spacing:

Row-to-row: 2–3 meters

Plant-to-plant: 1.5–2 meters

Support System: Use vertical trellises, poles, or a T-frame for climbing and branching.

Plant Density: About 1,200–1,600 plants per acre.

5. Irrigation

Frequency: Drip irrigation is ideal, requiring watering

every 2–3 days during the dry season.
Avoid Overwatering: Excess moisture can lead to root rot and fungal diseases.
6. Nutrient Management
Organic Matter: Apply 10–15 kg of well-decomposed compost per plant annually.
Fertilizer Schedule: NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potassium) in a ratio of 10:10:10 during the growing phase. Increase potassium (e.g., 5:5:15) during the flowering and fruiting stages for better quality. Micronutrients such as calcium and magnesium are also necessary.
7. Flowering and Pollination
Flowering Time: Flowers open at night and are pollinated by bats, moths, and bees.
Pollination: Some varieties are self-pollinating, while others require cross-pollination to ensure better fruit set.
Artificial Pollination: Apply manual pollination using a soft brush to guarantee better yields.
8. Pest and Disease Control
Common Pests:
Aphids: neem oil or insecticidal soaps control these pests
Mealybugs: Biological controls through ladybird beetles are used for control
Common Diseases:
Stem Rot and Root Rot: Due to water logging; fungicides like Carbendazim are applied.
Anthracnose: Preventive measures can be taken using copper-based fungicides.
9. Pruning and Training
Pruning: Removal of dead/diseased branches and also for the increase in air flow.
Training: Align the branches along the support system for better growth and flowering.
10. Harvesting
Maturation: Fruit is ready to be harvest within 30-50 days of flowering. This depends on the type.
Indicators: Presence of bright color of the skin of the fruit-red, pink, or yellow and slight softening.
Yield:
5–6 tons per acre for the first year.
15–20 tons per acre every subsequent year with good management
11. Post-Harvest Management
Handling: Fruits must be handled gently to avoid bruising.
Storage: This should be at 8–10°C to extend shelf life for up to 3 weeks
Packaging: Ventilated boxes or cartons to avoid accumulation of moisture
12. Economic Benefits
High Demand: Growing demand in the domestic and international markets.
Low Maintenance: Once established, it needs less aftercare compared to other fruit crops.
Subsidy Support: Governmental assistance for setting up trellises and drip irrigation systems.

Conclusion

Dragon fruit farming is a sustainable income-generating venture due to its adaptability and low input requirements. Efficient irrigation, balanced nutrition, and pest management through scientific practices ensure high-quality produce and long-term economic viability.