



MEDLAR

Latin: *Mespilus germanica*

Welsh: Merisbren

Originally from the Caucasus region of SE Europe, the Medlar was introduced into this country by the Romans.

The fruit, eaten by the Greeks and the Romans, was regarded as a delicacy.

The Romans made a 'wine' from the fruit and dedicated the Medlar to the god Saturn.

Medlars were grown in medieval monastic gardens, probably for medicinal usages.

Shakespeare punned on the fruit's name in *As You Like It* (Act III ii) where Rosalind tells Touchstone the interfering clown:

'You'll be rotten ere you be half ripe, and that's the right virtue of the medlar'.

The raw Medlar fruit is inedible until it is 'bled', i.e. allowed to become over-ripe so that the flesh softens and begins to rot but before the outer skin shows signs of decay. Frost will start the bletting process but this is more effectively achieved by harvesting the unripe fruit in late October/early November and storing in a cool dark place for a few weeks.

When cooked, the Medlar fruit makes a good bright red jelly.

Robert May, in *The Accomplisht Cook* (publ.1666) gives a recipe for Medlar Tart in which sugar, cinnamon, ginger and egg yolks are blended with the fruit.

Over the centuries, the Medlar was believed by herbalists and others to cure a variety of ailments including digestive disorders, haemorrhaging in women and kidney stones. Chemical analysis of the fruit in the 1930s supported its efficacy in regulating stomach upsets.