PRODUCTION POTENTIAL OF PITAYA IN THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

Thomas W. Zimmerman, Carlos Montilla and Stafford M.A. Crossman
University of the Virgin Island Agricultural Experiment Station, RR#1 Box 10,000,
Kingshill, VI 00850, U.S.A.
Email: tzimmer@uvi.edu

ABSTRACT

Pitaya or Dragon Fruit is a cactus, closely related to the native night blooming cereus, with a large succulent fruit. Twenty-six Pitaya varieties were established in a former grape trellis wire system. Plants were set in a replicated trial at either 2 ft (61 cm) or 4 ft (122 cm) intervals. Pitaya were established and proved able to grow to the top of a six foot trellis wire and flower within a year. Plant growth and flowering were monitored monthly and data recorded. Ripe fruit were harvested and data collected on weight, length, width, fruit flesh color and soluble sugar content. After a year of field establishment, 63% flowered and set fruit and all fruited by the second year. All flowers were naturally pollinated at night by bats and moths so no hand pollination was required. Six pitaya are recommended based on first year production, fruit size and sweetness. These varieties are ‘Dark Star’, ‘Delight’, ‘Halley’s Comet’, ‘Makisupa’, ‘Physical Graffiti’ and ‘Purple Haze’. Pitaya has potential for production in the Virgin Islands. This research was supported by USDA-Regional Hatch and USDA-SCBG administered through VIDoA.

Keywords: dragon fruit, cactus, Hylocereus, cereus