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*Annona diversifolia*

**ILLAMA** is a shrub or tree. Native to Mexico and to Central America (including Guatemala), it has small, maroon flowers with many stamens.

It is also known as *Anona* (Guatemalan, Spanish), *Anona blanca* (Antilles, Bolivian, Central American, Spanish), *Anona rosada* (El Salvador, Spanish), *Cherimole des terres basses* (French), *Chirimoya de las tierras bajas* (Spanish), *Ilama* (English, Mexican), *Ilamazapote* (Spanish), and *Papauce* (Costa Rican, Guatemalan, Spanish).

The large, densely white-bloomed, variably coloured but often pink-flushed, pale green fruit can weigh as much as 2 lb. and are described as having an unpleasant smell (in contrast to their taste).

Illama's fruit are often confused with those of soursop (*Annona muricata*) or sugar apple (*Annona squamosa*) and one of the ways by which the plant itself can be distinguished from these close relatives is by its unstalked leaf-like green bracts (petal-like leaves) which can be found at the base of small branches.

*Diversifolia* means 'diversely-leaved' with reference to the leaf shapes.

Although authorities state that King Philip II (1527-1598) of Spain received a record of the fruit in 1570, it seems that its confusion with close relatives continued for centuries and specific identification only occurred in 1911. In addition it appears that illama was introduced to many countries in other parts of tropical America (as well as the Philippines and parts of Asia such as Sri Lanka) particularly at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. But it is only in its homeland (Mexico and Guatemala especially) that one sees the fruit growing in gardens (or occasionally in orchards of 100 or more trees) and the fruit are available for sale in local markets. Illama has reached Florida in the south-eastern United States, California in the south-west, and Hawaii, but authorities note it is still rare in these places as well. (It has been suggested that, amongst other things, poor harvest and the perishability of the fresh fruit may well have contributed to the lack of enthusiasm for illama outside its native lands.)

Yet in Mexico and Guatemala for instance the fruit, which are eaten raw, are said to be prized.