

Citrus x meyeri

[Synonyms : *Citrus limon* ‘Meyer’]

MEYER LEMON is an evergreen hybrid shrub. Found in China it has very small, lemon-like yellow fruit.

It is also known as *Bei jing ning meng* (Chinese), Chinese dwarf lemon, Chinese lemon, Dwarf lemon, Grant lemon, *Guranto remon* (Japanese), Lemon, *Maiyaa remon* (Japanese), *Meyer’s Zitrone* (German), and *Xiang ning meng* (Chinese).

Meyeri can commemorate one or more of several people, including Carl Anton Meyer, Ernst H.F. Meyer and Frank Nicholas Meyer. The most likely candidate appears to be uncertain in this case.

First the Russian botanist and explorer, Carl Anton Andreevic von Meyer (1795-1855) who was director of the St. Petersburg Botanic Garden from 1850-1855..

Then the German botanist, Ernst H.F. Meyer (1791-1858) who published various works, among them *Commentariorum de Plantis Africae Australiores*, and *Geschichte der Botanik*. The latter history of botany, although understood to have been incomplete at his death, is said to have been highly respected..

Finally there is the Dutch-born American agricultural explorer and plant collector, Frank Nicholas Meyer (1875-1918). After emigrating to the United States in 1902 he initially collected plants in Mexico, Cuba and the south-western United States and then, under the patronage of the United States Department of Agriculture, he made four major expeditions to China and Manchuria. The first began in 1905 and the last in mid-1916. In addition to these he also collected plants in the Crimea, the region between the Caspian Sea and the Chinese border, and in Mongolia, Siberia and Tibet. His collections embraced economic and ornamental species (so many of them familiar in the West today) and he was responsible for over 2,500 introductions to North America. He also took way over 1000 photographs of plants, landscapes and cultural subjects from his trips and these have been archived. It was on his last major expedition that he died mysteriously while travelling down the Yangtze River (Chang Jiang) on his way to Shanghai – where he was eventually buried.

Notwithstanding the attribution of the name of this species, authorities suspect that it was F.N. Meyer (a relative perhaps of Frank Nicholas Meyer) who introduced the meyer lemon to the United States from China in 1980. Apparently the fruit are ever-increasing in popularity in the United States not least for their juice as this is less acid than that of the lemon (*Citrus limon*) and can be used in exactly the same way – and in the United States it is believed to be a cross between the lemon and the sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*) or the mandarin (*Citrus reticulata*).

The skin (or rind) and its essential oil can be used for flavouring food and drink (as can the fruit juice). The flowers are also edible and can be added to food and drink as garnish, decoration or flavouring – and the leaves, dried, can be mixed with tea leaves also as a flavouring.

Meyer lemon is often grown as a decorative pot plant. The Tower Hill Botanic Garden in Massachusetts in the USA boasts an Orangerie built only in 1986 and among the many plants growing there is the meyer lemon.

The seeds yield an oil employed in the manufacture of soap. The fruit skin provides an ingredient for pot pourris and it has also been placed in wardrobes as a pleasant-smelling insect repellent. Like some other citrus fruits meyer lemon juice can be included in metal polish eg. bronze – and it has also been used to remove ink stains.

Medicinally many claims are made for the benefits and use of meyer lemon in this capacity – similar to those recognized for the lemon (*Citrus limon*), including some skin disorders. Essential oils from the skin and flowers (the latter is of higher quality) are used to flavour medicines.