

One of the taller trees in the Tropical Dome is called ambarella. It can grow 40-60 feet high in its homeland in the Southeast Asian Tropics. Its scientific name is *Spondias dulcis* or *S. cytherea* . The tree is sometimes referred to as the Golden Apple or Otaheite Apple. Although originally from Asia, it has been introduced into all tropical areas of the world. It is sometimes even grown in California or Florida, but frost will kill it. The leaves are compound with pinnate leaflets, that is there are pairs of leaflets along the leaf stem like a walnut or sumac leaf. It is in the same family as cashew, mango, sumac and poison ivy. Like the mango, it produces abundant quantities of fruit that you can see if you look high into the tree in the Tropical Dome. First the tree produces white flowers on a branched stalk (panicle), but eventually the developing fruit hang down in clusters. The fruit are plum-shaped with a sweet-sour taste and can be eaten at all stages of ripeness. The flesh is yellow to orange and becomes more fragrant and sweet as it ripens. The taste has been described as similar to pineapple. Unlike many of the fruits that are familiar to us in Wisconsin, a distinguishing feature of the ambarella fruit is its spiny seed (see picture courtesy of the California Department of Agriculture). Fresh fruit must be eaten with care to avoid the sharp fibers of the seed.

There are many common tropical fruits that people in temperature climates don't know about or have not tried even after they start to appear in the grocery store. Many people are familiar with mangoes but not the fruit of the ambarella. Amberella fruit are most often eaten fresh, but they are also stewed like apple sauce, or used for juice, jelly, pickles, or flavoring in various sauces. The young leaves of the tree also are eaten, raw or steamed with fish and rice. Even the wood of the tree is used. It is light brown and buoyant and is sometimes used for canoes. Tip your head back next time you visit the Tropical Dome and look for the ambarella fruits.

