

Dimocarpus longan

Family: Sapindaceae

A small yellowish fruit, a litchi in disguise, that may confuse many. Yes, its resemblance to litchi has earned him adorable names, *Naga Lichu*, *Tokra*, *Kath lichu* and *Mirgoch* among the locals in the state of Assam and in Garo Hills, Meghalaya. In West Bengal, the fruit has a local name as *Aansphal*, a common surrogate of litchi. The fleshy aril is also cherished raw by the locals of Uttara Kannada, Karnataka. *Dimocarpus longan*, commonly known as Longan, is a tropical tree of soapberry (Sapindaceae) family that also includes its close kins e.g., litchi, rambutan, korlan. The plant is common in tropics of South Asia and the fruit has white fleshy aril sweeter than the common litchi. The black seed peeps through the white flesh and looks like a pupil and so-called 'dragon eye fruit'. However, largely owing to rampant logging in recent past the natural populations have dwindled to a great extent and it is now near threatened, although informal horticulture is practised at many places. History says that certain cultures have a long tradition of use (especially in China) but its wider acceptance has begun only recently. There are a few farmers who cultivate these fruits in the southern part of India as the fruit is used for treating insomnia, stomach pain, and dementia. Regarding the increasing cultivation area and increasing quantity of longan fruit, attempts have been taken in India as well. In the northern Bihar, longan cultivation has been started experimentally in Minapur, Mehshi, and Kanti among litchi growers. The modern culinary experts even use the fruit in dried, canned, and other processed forms. The dried flesh of the fruit is available in all supermarkets in India or via e-com stores serving processed foods.

