

“Island Gem”

By Ray Johnson

Why do you want to graft an African Pride (a variety of custard apple)” asked the local orchardist near Gin Gin. “I’ve got a tree of Island Gem and it’s better than African Pride,” he said.

I was looking for another variety to graft on to my Pink’s Mammoth and this sounded like an interesting option. I hadn’t heard of Island Gem before, but found a snippet in one of our library books, (“Growing Fruit in Warm Climates: by Brian Cull). He states: “Island Gem is a tree to 12 metres in diameter (that tree needs a prune!) with medium vigour. It begins fruiting in about year 4, producing heavy crops. The fruit are small, thin skinned with a high susceptibility to splitting. The flesh is of good texture, and excellent flavour with a moderate number of seeds. It is the earliest variety in the year.

The local orchardist that I mentioned earlier, Barry, says it’s self-pollinating and basically trouble free. His wife calls it their \$100 tree because they make that much and more at the local farmers market from this one tree.

Besides doing 3 grafts on my Pink’s Mammoth. I’ve started 5 air-layers. Hopefully, they will all take, and I’ll have some to share around.



Figure 1 Local orchardist Barry Knetter in front of his 16 year old Island Gem



Figure 2 – Two months from harvest