

Hazelnuts

Background

Hazelnuts grown commercially in Australia are cultivars of the European hazelnut, *Corylus avellana*. This species is native to temperate regions of Europe including Turkey, Iran and Syria, where it grows as a shrubby tree. Generally, European hazelnut has a short husk with the nut protruding while many other species produce nuts in a closed husk. Other hazelnut species include: American hazel, *C. americana*; Turkish tree hazel, *C. colurna* (that includes two varieties: var. *chinensis* or Chinese tree hazel, and var. *jacquemontii* or India tree hazel); Beaked hazel, *C. cornuta* (with the variety *californica* or Californian beaked hazel); Himalayan hazel, *C. ferox*; Siberian hazel, *C. heterophylla*; Giant hazel, *C. maxima*; Japanese hazel, *C. sieboldiana*; and Tibetan hazel, *C. tibetica*.

The common name for all species of *Corylus* in Australia is hazelnut while in America species of hazelnut are called 'filbert'. In the United Kingdom the name 'cobnut' is generally used to refer to varieties of European hazelnut and name the 'filbert' is used to refer to the Giant hazel that has a long husk covering the nut. Apart from European hazelnut, the only other species of *Corylus* that produces a nut valued for human consumption is *C. americana*. The different hazelnut species cross readily and this has resulted in many hybrid forms.

Hazelnuts have been grown in Australia since the early 1900s. Renewed interest in growing hazelnuts commercially emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and new orchards were planted. Unfortunately the trees planted in many of these orchards were unsuitable varieties or proved not to be true to type and yields were disappointing. Much research was conducted to rectify the problem. In recent years, new interest in growing hazelnuts has been generated following a thorough overhaul of nursery techniques, the establishment of identifiable cultivars and the importation of cultivars from overseas. Hazelnut cultivars purchased from reputable nurseries now provide reliable stock and today the annual yield expected from mature trees is in the order of five kilograms per tree.