

PLANTSPROFILE

*Actinidia arguta* 'Ken's Red'  
has succulent purple fruit

# Growing & cultivating *Actinidia*

In the November 2009 issue of *The Garden*, Szczepan Marczyński introduced some increasingly available kiwi fruit. Here he explains how best to grow them ➞



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### Successful pollination

*Actinidia arguta*, *A. kolomikta* and *A. purpurea* all begin flowering in May and June (*A. kolomikta* with its lemon-scented blooms is usually first). They bear small, white flowers 2–4cm ( $\frac{3}{4}$  –  $1\frac{1}{2}$ in across) that are generally dioecious – the male and female flowers borne on different plants, so ensure you grow both for fruit. The male flowers, produced in racemes of a dozen or so, have well-developed anthers and their pollen remains fertile for three to four days. Female flowers are usually carried individually or in small clusters of two or three, and have a large pistil surrounded by



Above: A heavy crop of *Actinidia arguta* 'Jumbo' fruit  
Left: *A. arguta* 'Weiki' will quickly scale a trellis or wall

pollenless stamens. They can be pollinated for up to nine or 10 days. The number and size of berries depends on good pollination, so it is vital that female and male plants are near to each other and bloom at around the same time. Actinidias are principally pollinated by bees and other insects and, to a lesser extent, by wind. However, the flowers are in fact relatively unattractive to insects, so it may be worth carrying out hand pollination. To do this, pick a freshly opened male flower and brush it for one to two seconds against a female flower. The pollen of one male flower is sufficient to pollinate about five female flowers.

### Nutrition and culinary use

The fruit of these three *Actinidia* species are roughly gooseberry sized: *A. arguta* and *A. purpurea* berries are 2.5–5cm (1–2in) long and weigh about 5–30g ( $\frac{1}{4}$ –1oz) each, while *A. kolomikta* fruits are 2–2.5cm ( $\frac{3}{4}$ –1in) long, 1–1.3cm ( $\frac{3}{8}$ – $1\frac{1}{2}$ in) across and weigh 2.5–3g (about  $\frac{1}{8}$ oz). They are almost totally devoid of fat, low in sodium and rich in vitamin C. (There is about 400mg per 100g vitamin C in *A. arguta* and *A. purpurea* fruit, and 1,400mg per 100g in *A. kolomikta* and its cultivars. By comparison, an orange contains 100mg per 100g of this vitamin.) Fruits can be eaten raw,






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added to cakes, jellies, salads and other dishes enriching summer and autumn meals, dried as grapes (they will resemble raisins), frozen and marinated. They are also ideal for preparing wines, liqueurs, jams or marmalades, and they do not prevent jellies from setting as do more familiar kiwi fruit (*A. deliciosa*).

### Growing kiwis

When planting, ensure male plants are evenly distributed among females. If you have enough room, choose several cultivars with different ripening times, fruit size and flavour, such as *A. arguta* cultivars 'Geneva 2' (the earliest ripening time), 'Jumbo' (the biggest berries), 'Ken's Red' (red fruit in the sun), and a female plant of 'Weiki' (the most universal), with a male 'Weiki' plant in the middle. If you have room for just one plant, you can also choose hermaphrodite 'Issai', but its fruit ripens late and so it may get damaged by autumn frost before it has a chance to ripen.



*Actinidia arguta* 'Rogów'  
can produce prolific crops

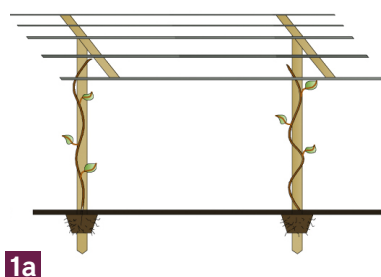
Pruning advice  
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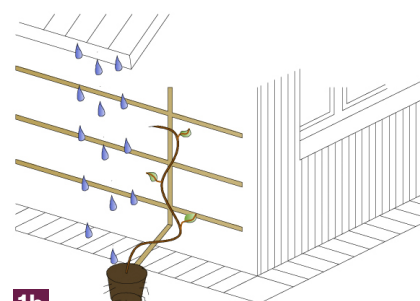
# Training and pruning *Actinidia*

## Planting

It takes three to four years to establish a plant, but then actinidias will continue to grow and bear fruit for up to 50 years. Training and pruning are the same as with *Actinidia deliciosa* (kiwi fruit) cultivation: in commercial plantations, actinidias are usually trained along a T-shaped trellis **1a** to ensure the best crop. In domestic gardens it is more convenient to grow plants along wires stretched between posts, or more usually against a wall or a fence **1b**.



1a

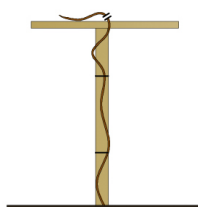


1b

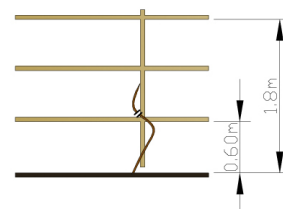
## Winter pruning after the first year

In the first growing season, train a leading shoot. In February trim it 3–5cm (1–2in) above the top of the support (do this before the growing season starts otherwise it will bleed) **2a 2b**.

2a



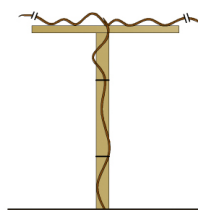
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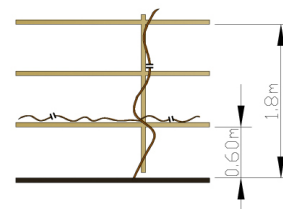
## Winter pruning after the second and third year

In the second year choose a pair of the strongest lateral stems and train them to the sides, tying to a wire. In winter (February) prune the tips leaving eight to 12 buds on each of them **3a 3b**.

3a



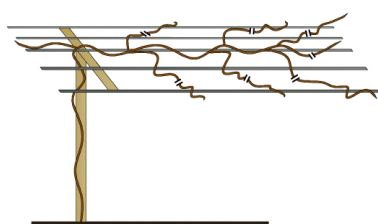
3b



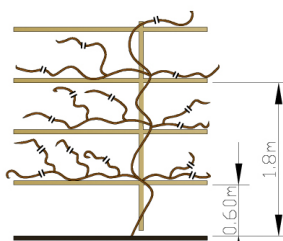
## Winter pruning in the third and fourth year

In spring these buds will develop into permanent fruiting stems and will start yielding fruit the following year. Again, tie these to the sides and pinch out at the tips in August to encourage formation of numerous flower buds **4a 4b**.

4a



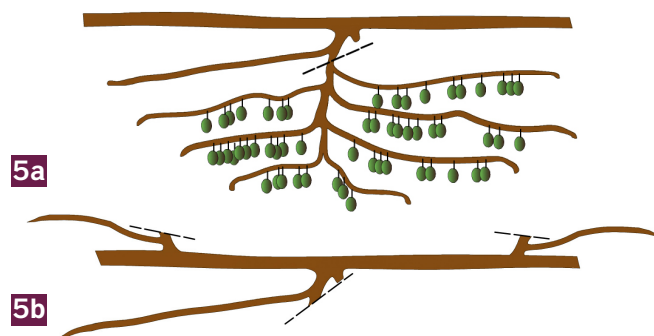
4b



## Aftercare

The following year, in autumn, pick the berries and, in winter, cut back 30–70 percent of fruiting stems above the branching point from which new fruiting shoots will grow **5a 5b**.

Each year in summer and winter you should remove any sideshoots growing from the trunk, and thin out excessive growth.



5a

5b