

WAX GOURD

Winter Gourd, White Gourd, Tallow Gourd, Chinese Wintermelon, Chinese Preserving Melon, Petha, Kondol

Benincasa hispida

Cucurbitaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

Wax Gourd is considered to be Southeast Asian and Indonesian in origin. Records of Chinese use of this species trace to 500 a.d. Today, Wax Gourd is successfully cultivated in lowland tropical environments to an elevation of 1,300 m (4,000 ft), in the Americas as well as in the Old World.

Uses

Wax Gourd is grown primarily as a food plant for its fruit. In China, Wax Gourds are used as cooking containers. Tender vine tips and seedlings discarded from plant thinning operations may be boiled and eaten as a vegetable. The seeds, like pumpkin seeds, also may be fried and eaten. The waxy fruit covering has been used to make candles as the name “Tallow Gourd” implies.

Common Names

- French
 - courge cireuse
- Spanish
 - Calabaza De Cera

Cultivation

Wax Gourds are annual plants readily propagated from seeds. Wax Gourd seeds store well and they are long-lived; remaining viable for up to 10 years. Germination occurs in 1-2 weeks. Plant seeds in widely spaced hills or rows. Thin seedlings to 1.2–2.0 m (3.5-6 ft) apart in the row. Wax Gourds will grow in a variety of soil types. Although Wax Gourds are drought-tolerant, irrigation may be required during low rainfall periods if the soil is coarse-textured. Adding manure prior to planting or fertilizers after planting will help provide the needed nutrients to promote the luxuriant growth of vines and fruits. Wax Gourd thrives in a warm climate and may be grown in the summer seasons in subtropical regions. It suffers from foliage diseases in excessively humid climates. It can be grown year round in tropical regions; up to 3 plantings and harvests per year are possible. Wax Gourds are frost sensitive and, in seasonal climates, fewer plantings per year are possible. Wax Gourds may be grown as spreading vines or as climbers on trellises. Wax Gourds sometimes are planted alongside flat-roofed dwellings and trained to grow up trellises, allowing the gourds to develop on the rooftops. Some Chinese gardeners plant Wax Gourds alongside ponds and provide trellises over the water to conserve valuable land space for other garden species. Wax Gourds have unisexual flowers and require insect or human-assisted pollination for fruit production.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The fruits of Wax Gourds come in two basic shapes depending upon the variety: oblong or round. Both forms have remarkable keeping quality. The mature gourds may be stored from 4-6 months in dry cool environments on shelves or hung in sacks. The fruits, which ripen approximately 5 months after planting, may be picked slightly immature or allowed to ripen fully depending upon the intended use.

Pests and Diseases

Wax Gourds are relatively pest- and disease-free. Fruit flies and melon flies may attack young fruits. Pumpkin beetles and aphids sometimes damage young seedlings.

Cooking and Nutrition

The bland white inner fruit pulp may be eaten raw or cooked and served in a variety of ways. Wax Gourds are cut open, the seeds are scooped out and the hollow interior filled with mixtures containing diced cooked ham or chicken, cooked dried shrimp in their cooking water, hydrated black mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and flavorings; all of it allowed to steam 3-6 hours in the gourd container. The cooked gourd pulp then is spooned out and served with the soup. In India, the sweetmeat “dulce” commonly is prepared from Wax Gourd pulp by boiling ripe fruit strips in sugar water for a long period of time. The low calorie content of the fruit allows it to be used as belly filler or as a weight reduction dietary component. It can be chopped raw, like cucumber, into salads. Young fruits may be peeled to remove the outer waxy, hairy rind and then cooked like Zucchini Squash or served in soups and casseroles.