

TOMATILLO

Jam Berry, Mexican Husk Tomato

Physalis ixocarpa

Solanaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

The origin is believed to be in Mexico and Central America. Used by the Mayan and Aztecs, it is still cultivated throughout the Central Americas. They are also cultivated in the United States, India, Australia and South Africa. It is a close relative of the tomato and is used and grown like tomatoes. The flowers are yellow and the ~2.5cm diameter fruit develops in a green-purple bladder like calyx resembling a Chinese lantern.

Uses

It can be eaten out of hand when ripe and sweet. It is used in salsa, chili sauces, stews, soups and can be fried, baked or used in purees. The calyx that wraps around it is toxic. It can be stored a long time if picked unripe with the calyx intact. When fully ripe the calyx turns brown and splits open. The ripe fruit can be green, yellow or purple depending on the variety.

Cultivation

Grown like tomatoes, it will take 50-70 days to produce green fruit. It requires full sun or light shade. It likes well-drained soil and a long, warm growing season. It grows at elevations as high 2600 m (8500 ft) and in areas with 600 mm to 1100 mm annual rainfall. Plants are usually started from seeds, though cuttings can be used. It gets to be 0.9 m -1.8 m (3 ft - 6 ft) tall and will need support.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The unripe green Tomatillo fruit can be harvested for use in sauces and salsa. The flavor improves over a 3-4 week period after it has been picked. The ripe Tomatillo fruit that will mature a few weeks later, can be harvested for a sweeter fruit and for seeds. The seeds are easy to save. The ripe fruits should be mashed in water. Water should be added and the mixture stirred. The viable seeds will sink to the bottom and the immature seeds will float. Collect the good seeds and let dry on a ceramic or glass plate. They will remain viable for years if stored in a cool, dry place.

Pests and Diseases

There are few serious pests or diseases in dryer climates. There are problems with stem borers and corn earworms in the wet season.

Cooking and Nutrition

Tomatillos are an important ingredient in salsas. As a key component of salsa verde, it is served with tacos, enchiladas and chile rellenos. The ripe fruits are sweet and eaten out of hand. Tomatillos are used in salads, preserves, guacamole, and stews. They are a good source of vitamin C.