IVY GOURD

Scarlet Gourd

Coccinia grandis Cucurbitaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

Ivy gourd is a perennial vine with white, star shaped flowers and cucumber-like fruit which is green when immature and bright red when ripe. It is naturalized or native in Southeast Asia and East Africa, but is listed as an invasive weed in Saipan, Guam, Fiji, Hawaii, Solomon Islands, Tongatapu Island and Western Australia.

Uses

Young shoots and leaves are eaten cooked. Green fruit are eaten cooked and ripe fruit either cooked or raw. Ripe fruit are also reportedly candied. Ivy gourds are rich in beta-carotene. Some cultivars that have bitter fruits are used only for their leaves and shoots.

Crop uses (medicinal) – Ivy gourd leaves and roots are used in traditional medicine in India to treat diabetes and stomach or intestinal troubles. Trials have confirmed that it has potential for lowering blood sugar.

Crop uses (other) – Goats, sheep, cattle, donkey and camels eat Ivy Gourd.

Common Names

Cultivation

Ivy gourd is most often planted by cuttings intercropped with maize or other short-duration crops during its early stages. Long stems are trained along wires attached to poles. Weeding is done by machete or hand, as hoeing might damage roots. Some farmers will irrigate into the dry season to prolong production, while others prefer to give the plants a rest period before new rains come. Leaves will dry out during the dry season and are removed by beating the plant to make room for new shoots. Regular pruning is required to stimulate new growth because older branches dry out and will no longer produce leaves or flowers.

In countries where Ivy Gourd has been introduced, it can become a serious weed. It grows fast, covering the ground and smothering shrubs. Control is difficult because the plant can grow back from broken rootsock if the plant is ripped up. Despite this, cultivation is quite common already in SE Asia.

Ivy gourd can be found up to 2350 m (7700 ft) altitude. It is cultivated in semi-arid, sub-tropical and tropical environments. The plant can sustain longer dry seasons because of energy stored in its tuberous roots.

Grows in a variety of soil types, most frequently on sandy soils.

Seasons of production – Ivy gourd plants flower and fruit profusely. As long as there is enough moisture in the soil, the plant will continue producing.

Length of production and harvest period – The period from planting to first harvest takes up to 5 months. Best production is on young shoots, so pruning back is encouraged.

Pollination – Ivy gourd is a dioecious plant, meaning it has male flowers on one plant and female on another. Thus, multiple plants are required for fruit set. Pollinated by insects.

Plant spacing – Spacing is wide, 1-1.5 m (3-5 ft). Plants can become 20 years old or older and main stems may become 30 m (100 ft) long. In cultivation, plants are pruned and controlled, but spacing should be chosen based on management intentions.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Seed saving – When fruits are fully mature, split them lengthwise, scoop the seeds into a container and cover with water to ferment for 3 days. Good seed should settle to the bottom of the container. Rinse and then dry the seeds on a screen or absorbent paper either indoors or out. Store dried, viable seeds in an airtight container located in a cool place for up to five years.

Pests and Diseases

Known pests – Ivy gourd is host to a range of diseases including powdery mildew (Sphaerotheca fuliginea, Erysiphe eichoracearum). Other diseases include black rot (Curvularia pallescens) and stem rot (Rhizoctonia solani). Viral diseases, such as watermelon mosaic virus, may affect the plant. Cucurbit sucking insects can distort fruits and cause dieback of the shoots. Aphids, fruit flies and caterpillars are common feeders.

References

Grubben, G. J. H. 2004. Vegetables. Wageningen, Netherlands: Backhuys.

ECHO® 17391 Durrance Rd, N. Fort Myers FL 33917 USA
Tel: (239) 543-3246 | Email: echo@echonet.org | Website: ECHOcommunity.org

Siemonsma, J. & K. Piluek. (editors). 1994. Plant Resources of South-east Asia No. 8. Vegetables. Prosea Foundation, Bogor, Indonesia.

ECHO® 17391 Durrance Rd, N. Fort Myers FL 33917 USA
Tel: (239) 543-3246 | Email: echo@echonet.org | Website: ECHOcommunity.org