

ITALIAN EDIBLE GOURD/CUCUZZI

Italian Edible Gourd, Cucuzzi, Italian Edible Gourd, Italian Squash, Guinea Bean, New Guinea Bean, Suzza Melon, Tasmania Bean, Zucca

Lagenaria siceraria

Cucurbitaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

The Cucuzzi plant grows as a long trailing vine with large long-stalked leaves forming a canopy over the flowers and fruits. Like other gourds, the flowers of Cucuzzi Gourd are white. The fruits are light green and smooth-skinned. Fruit shape varies but usually is long and cylindrical; up to 1 m (3 ft) in length and 8 cm (3 in) in diameter.

Origin

This Italian Edible Gourd, long cultivated in Italy, is believed to have its origin in India. The parent species, the Bottle Gourd, *Lagenaria siceraria*, is believed to have its origin in Africa. The immature fruits are normally eaten whole as a cooked vegetable or sliced in soups or stir fry, although some gardeners report using Cucuzzi Gourd baked, raw, frozen, or pickled. The flavor is like that of zucchini although stronger.

Uses

The uses of Cucuzzi Gourd are similar to those of zucchini squash.

Cultivation

The Cucuzzi plant grows as a long trailing vine with large long-stalked leaves forming a canopy over the flowers and fruits. Like other gourds, the flowers of Cucuzzi Gourd are white. The fruits are light green and smooth-skinned. Fruit shape varies but usually is long and cylindrical; up to 1 m (3 ft) in length and 8 cm (3 in) in diameter. The white fruit pulp contains numerous white seeds; the seeds are 1-1.5 cm long, pointed at one end, three-lobed at the other end. Plant seeds 2-3 cm (1 in) deep about 50 cm (20 in) apart in rows spaced approximately 1 m (3 ft) apart.

The Cucuzzi Gourd responds well to heavy irrigation. Monthly feeding with a side dressing of compost or vegetable fertilizer is recommended from planting until blossoming. Cucuzzi Gourd requires insect pollination for fruit set. Touching a fresh picked male flower upside down onto a female flower may assist pollination when insects are few or unavailable.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The Cucuzzi Gourd requires 60-80 days after planting to reach maturity. Fruits normally are harvested when they reach 20-30 cm (8-12 in) in length. If the fruits are allowed to remain on the vine longer they will increase in size but they also will become hard-shelled.

Pests and Diseases

Cucumber beetles may attack young blossoms of Cucuzzi Gourd plants. The Cucuzzi Gourd has some susceptibility to nematodes. This species has shown resistance, however, to diseases common to squash plants such as fruit spot and rot and the leaf diseases of leaf blight, powdery mildew, and wilt.

Cooking and Nutrition

The immature fruits normally are eaten whole as a cooked vegetable or sliced in soups or stir fry, although some gardeners report using Cucuzzi Gourd baked, raw, frozen, or pickled. The flavor is like that of zucchini although stronger.