

SEMINOLE PUMPKIN

SEMINOLE PUMPKIN Calabaza de los Seminole

Cucurbita moschata

Cucurbitaceae – Familia de las Calabazas

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

The Seminole Pumpkin is native to South Florida, USA, where it grew wild and was cultivated by Florida aborigines and later by Miccosukees, Muskogees, and early European settlers. Naturalists record the conspicuous presence of Seminole Pumpkin fruits hanging from tree limbs during their travels to Florida already in the 18th century. Some early users of this pumpkin planted the seeds near the bases of trees and girdled the trees to kill the trees.

Uses

The Seminole Pumpkins are eaten in a variety of ways—raw, boiled, fried, baked, mashed, steamed, stuffed, dried, or used in pies. Young fruits can be pickled, and the seeds are eaten raw or roasted. The flowers, leaves, and young stems are eaten as a green vegetable or added to soups.

Cultivation

Plant seeds 1-2 cm (0.5-1 in) deep, 3-4 seeds per hill. Space hills approximately 1.5-2 m (4.5-6 ft) apart. In most soil situations, the vines need to be fertilized only at planting time. Seminole Pumpkin has been successfully interplanted with avocado and grapefruit. The vines will grow widely spreading along the surface of the ground, rooting at nodes, or they may be grown on trellises or other supports. They have a strong tendency to climb on upright objects, clambering over other plants, or growing up tree trunks and limbs. Leaves on older fruiting branches die back but younger branches will continue the growth of the plant. The leaves have bristly hairs which may irritate human skin. The separate male and female yellow flowers produce nectar at maturity attracting honeybee pollinators. Fruit shapes vary depending upon the variety or strain used. The Hardy strain has oval or oblong fruits. 'Ingram Billie' has more spherical (oblate) fruits about the size of a grapefruit. The yellow to orange colored thick skin is hard and often slightly furrowed.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Seedlings, transplanted in September at four weeks old, began fruiting by mid-February here in Florida. Fruits are harvested after they reach the full buff to orange color. Bearing may be continuous over an extended period for some varieties. The thin-skinned Cuban variety 'Calabaza' is shorter lived. The fruits of the Seminole Pumpkin store well (for several months or even up to a year) in dry well ventilated storage locations without detectable loss of quality. As cross-pollination is common, for pure seed production plants of different varieties must be isolated by 0.8 km (0.5 mile), or plants must be hand-pollinated following standard cucurbit seed production techniques.

Pests and Diseases

Seminole Pumpkin apparently is pest free in its native environment. A disease called gummy stem blight was identified on Florida grown plants. This blight; which causes leaves to yellow, wilt, and die; may be controlled by spraying with the fungicide, Benlate.

Cooking and Nutrition

Whole Pumpkins have been roasted in burning coals of wood fires. A recommended cooking method is oven baking cut open fruits, from which seeds have been removed and butter and brown sugar has been added. Some chefs add only butter with salt and pepper before baking. Seminole Pumpkin users save pumpkin fruits by cutting them into strips and drying them. The dried pumpkin is later ground into a meal for baking bread. Young green fruits, from which the flowers have just fallen, may be

cooked, mashed, seasoned, and eaten as a vegetable. Male flowers also may be eaten; they are dipped in batter and fried.