



PLANT FACT SHEET

Trichosanthes cucumerina L.

GENUS *Trichosanthes* FAMILY Cucurbitaceae

COMMON NAMES Snake gourd

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Fruit, Vegetable

The long immature fruit are eaten cooked. Sometimes a bitter taste occurs but this disappears with boiling. They can be baked, stuffed or used in curries and stews. Fruit are inedible when ripe.

The young leaves are eaten cooked.

DESCRIPTION

A pumpkin family plant. It is a climber with tendrils. It grows 2.4-6 m high and spreads 1.5-3 m wide. The vine has furrows along it. The leaves have 3 to 7 lobes and a tooth like edge. The flowers are white. The male flowers are without a bract and the female flowers are produced singly. The flowers have long stalks. The long fruit tend to curve. They can be 1-2 m long. When ripe they turn orange or red, but are grey and green when young.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It is common in the humid tropical lowlands up to 500 m. It does not tolerate dry soil and requires a good moisture reserve in the soil, but is sensitive to water-logging. The optimum temperature for growth is 30-35°C with a minimum of 20°C. It occurs throughout the Philippines at low and medium altitudes up to 1200 m. It suits hardiness zones 10-12. In Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Snake gourd is grown from seed. Seed germinate after 10 days. It requires 4-6 kg/ha. Seed can be sown in a nursery and transplanted at the 2 true leaf stage. More commonly plants are sown where they are to grow. A spacing of 60 - 100 cm is suitable. Plants need supports to climb. Often in home gardens this is a natural support such as a house. Plants respond to fertiliser but excessive nitrogen can produce too much vegetative growth. Pruning can improve the female to male flower ratio.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Flowering starts 5 weeks after planting. Male flowers appear first then female flowers 3 days later. Pollination is normally by insects. Harvesting of fruit starts 6-7 weeks after planting and continues for 1 or 2 months. Fruit are picked 12-20 days after fruit set when they are 30-60 cm long. Fruit do not store well but can be stored for 10-14 days at a temperature of 16-17°C and relative humidity of 85-90%.

By the time the fruit turn orange they are too mature to eat.

NOTES

Trichosanthes anguina is a correct name and also *Trichosanthes cucumerina*.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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