PLANT FACT SHEET

Clitoria ternatea L.

GENUS *Clitoria* **FAMILY** Fabaceae

COMMON NAMES Butterfly Bean, Darwin pea, Streaky Bean

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Pods, Flowers - tea, Flowers

CAUTION: The seeds are poisonous.
The leaves are cooked and eaten. The juice is also used to colour food green.
The flowers are cooked with rice to colour it blue. The dried flowers are steeped in boiling water and the coloured water used to tint rice cakes and sweets. The flowers are also eaten in salads.
The young pods are cooked and eaten. The seeds are used in soup.

DESCRIPTION

A perennial herb plant. It grows to 3-4.5 m tall and spreads to 4 m wide. The stem is slender and twines. The leaves are green and divided. They are 6-12 cm long. The 5-9 leaflets are oval. The flowers are bright purple. They are pea like and 3-5 cm across. They have yellow tinted white centres. The flowers occur either singly or in pairs. The fruit are flat pods. They are 7 cm long. After the seeds fall the pods twist. The seeds are dark brown to black.

HABITAT

It is a tropical plant. It will grow on most soils. It needs a sheltered sunny position. It is drought and frost tender. Mostly they grow on the edge of forests. It grows where the minimum temperature is 16°C. In Nepal it grows to about 250 m altitude in hedges and thickets. It can grow in arid places. In XTBG Yunnan. It suits hardiness zones 10-12.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants can be grown from seed or cuttings. For seed the temperature should be at least 19-24°C. Seeds can be slow to germinate. This can be improved by filing, or soaking in hot water to break the hard seed coat. It is grown as an annual plant in temperate zones.

NOTES

It becomes a weed in many places forming tangled hedges. There are about 40 Clitoria species.
In the Botanical Gardens in Slovenia - presumably in a hot house.

PICTURES

Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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