PLANT FACT SHEET

Use with caution

This plant can be harmful if it is eaten raw, in large amounts or without the right preparation. Read the whole fact sheet before use.

Citrullus colocynthis (L.) Schrader

GENUS *Citrullus* **FAMILY** Cucurbitaceae

COMMON NAMES Colocynth, Bitter Apple, Bitter Cucumber

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Seeds, Fruit, Seeds - oil, Vegetable, Leaves

CAUTION: The fruit is poisonous if regularly eaten. The fruit requires long boiling to remove the bitter principle. The skin is pierced before boiling. The water is changed several times.
The seeds are washed with salt water many times. They are also buried with salt in sand and kept covered there for a few weeks. They are then washed and ground and made into flour. The coating is removed.
The seeds are also roasted. The seeds yield an edible oil.
The fruit are pickled.

DESCRIPTION

A pumpkin family plant. It is a climbing plant. It lies along the ground and keeps growing from year to year. The stems are like vines. They have soft hairs and tendrils at the nodes. Many stems arise from a stout woody taproot. The leaves are grey-green and have a long stalk. They are triangle shaped but with large rounded lobes. Both leaf surfaces have stiff hairs. The flowers have five yellow petals. The flowers occur singly on short stalks in the axils of leaves. The fruit can be 10 cm across. They have a dark and light green colour. The fruit turns yellow as it ripens. The pulp is white and bitter. Some varieties are sweet.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It is native to Tropical Africa. It grows in Mediterranean and warm temperate places. It grows on sandy soils, sand dunes and open plains. It is very drought tolerant. It produces best in dry, sunny periods. It grows in desert places. It can grow in arid places.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It can be grown from seed or root segments.

Harvesting and Seed Production

In Sikkim fruit are available September to October.

NOTES

There are 3 Citrullus species.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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