



PLANT FACT SHEET

Cnidoscolus aconitifolius (Mill.) I. M. Johnst.

GENUS *Cnidoscolus* **FAMILY** Euphorbiaceae

COMMON NAMES Chaya, Tree-spinach

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Vegetable

The leaves are boiled and eaten as a vegetable. Gloves are used in harvesting to avoid stinging hairs. The leaves are chopped and then boiled for about 20 minutes. They can be used in soups and stews.

CAUTION: The leaves contain a toxin which is removed by boiling. This hydrocyanic acid is removed by boiling for at least 2 minutes.

DESCRIPTION

A shrub. It can grow 2 m tall. It can be a tree up to 7 m tall. It is a small densely shady, rounded tree. The central stem is about 10 cm across. The side branches are 2 cm thick and end abruptly. The cut stem exudes latex. Some varieties have stinging hairs on the leaves. The domesticated varieties need to be chosen. The leaves are large and dark green. They have deep lobes arranged like fingers on a hand. There are coarse teeth around the edge. The leaves can be 22 cm wide and 18 cm long. The leaves are not flat. The leaf stalks are 60 cm long. The flowers are small. The flowering stalks have 3-4 forks. The whole flower head is 2-10 cm across. The female flowers are near the lowest forks and the male flowers at the ends. The flowers have an unpleasant smell. Some varieties occur. The forms without stinging hairs are classified as Chayamansa group.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It needs moderate moisture. It needs an average well-drained soil. It can grow in full sun or light shade. It often grows in dry regions but is also adapted to the hot humid tropics. It normally grows at low altitudes. It grows on atolls. At ECHO.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from cuttings. Thick cuttings can be slow to root and thin cuttings can rot. It is best to allow the cutting to dry for a day or two before planting to avoid rotting. They can be planted at any time of the year. Cuttings from 10 cm to 1 m can be used. They can be planted directly into well drained soil that is not too wet. The plants can be used as a hedge.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It is slow to establish. Sprouting can take 2-6 weeks. After the first year plants can be pruned regularly. The leaves can be harvested year round. From a well established plant, leaves can be harvested several times each week almost continually.

NOTES

There are 75 *Cnidoscolus* species. There are 65 *Cnidoscolus* species in tropical America. It has high food value. It is rich in Vitamin A.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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