

**Common names****Indian spinach,****Basellaceae****Scientific name*****Basella alba*****Edible portion**

Leaves, Tender stems, Vegetable,

**Description**

An annual or perennial climbing herb with thick fleshy leaves. The vine is smooth and juicy and can be 10 m long. It branches freely. The vine and leaves can be red or green. The leaves are fleshy and pointed at the tip. They can be 8-18 cm long and 8-10 cm across. They are carried alternately along the vine. Leaves can be heart shaped or oval. It has white, pink or red flowers in short spikes which are in the axils of the leaves. Flowers have both sexes. The fruit are round and soft. They can be red, white or black and are 6-8 mm across. The seeds are round and black. They are 3 mm across. (Often the ones with heart shaped leaves are called *Basella cordifolia*, the ones with a red stem *Basella rubra* and the short day flowering dark green kind called *Basella alba*.)

Distribution

A tropical plant. It occurs mostly in the tropical lowlands and is best below 500 m but will grow up to about 1600 m. in the equatorial tropics. It will grow quite well in the temperature range 15-35°C. It does not like water-logging but can survive 4-12 weeks drought once well established. It requires adequate water during the growing season. It grows well in a variety of soils. The best pH is 5.5-7.0. It cannot tolerate salty conditions. Flowering does not occur when day lengths are over 13 hours. It is found throughout the Philippines in waste places. It can grow in arid places. In XTBG Yunnan.

Found in:

Africa, Algeria, Amazon, Andamans, Angola, Asia, Australia, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canary Islands, Central Africa, Central African Republic, CAR, China, Congo DR, Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Dominican Republic, East Africa, East Timor, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Europe, Fiji, France, Ghana, Guiana, Guianas, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Hawaii, Himalayas, India, Indochina, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Kiribati, Laos, Lesser Antilles, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mexico, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, North Africa, North America, Northeastern India, Pacific, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, PNG, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Rwanda, Sahel, Sao Tome and Principe, SE Asia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Southern Africa, South America, Sri Lanka, Sudan, South Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Taiwan.

Use

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The young shoots and leaves are eaten cooked. They are somewhat slimy.

In soups and stews the mucilage can be used as thickening.

The purple colour of fruit is harmless and is used to colour vegetables and agar-agar. Some lemon juice added to the dye enhances the colour.

The leaves can be eaten raw in salads or cooked like a vegetable. They are also dried and stored. When fresh they can be stored for 4-5 days.

Cultivation

It can be sown from seeds or cuttings. Seeds germinate in a few days. Normally sticks are provided for support or it is allowed to grow over fences and stumps. If seeds are used, 3 kg of seed will sow one hectare and they are best sown in a nursery and transplanted. A spacing of 1 m is suitable. Plants grown from seed are more productive than from cuttings. When cuttings are used, 20-25 cm long cuttings are suitable. Where the plant grows over light soil it can root at the nodes and continue growing continually. Partial shade, rich fertile soil and adequate moisture favour abundant leaf production. It is responsive to nitrogen fertiliser. Light shade gives bigger leaves. It requires a trellis to climb over. Frequently picking off the bud encourages branching.

Production

It is 4-6 weeks until the first harvest. It grows reasonably well on poor soils and is fairly resistant to pest and disease. Leaves will only store for one day at 20-30°C. Yields of 40 kg of leaves from a 10 metre square bed is possible over 75 days. Leaves are plucked from the vine.

Nutritional Values

Basella alba

Edible Part	/100 g edible portion	Moisture %	Energy KJ	Energy Kcal	Protein g	Provit A µg	Vit C mg	Iron mg	Zinc mg
Leaves		85.0	202	48	5.0	56	100	4.0	



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