

Katuk - *Sauropus androgynus*

Katuk (*Sauropus androgynus*) is a shrub, indigenous to Southeast Asia that is cultivated in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and India. It thrives in tropical climates in lowland rainforests where it grows between 4-6 feet tall.

Katuk is an upright bush with multiple stems and dark green, oval shaped leaves. In tropical climates, the plant stays green year round, but in cooler climates, the bush will likely lose leaves in the winter only to regrow in the spring. The shrub blooms in the summer and fall with small, flat, round, yellow to red flowers in the leaf axil followed by a purple fruit with tiny black seeds. It takes two Katuk shrubs to pollinate and produce fruit.

Katuk or “Sweet Leaf Bush” is a perennial plant that’s for its edible leaves and young shoots. It also has an ability to survive well in hot and humid conditions. It’s easily propagated by cuttings and if they’re planted close together with the addition of fertilizer, the bushes will form a hedge of edible leaves for year round consumption.



It produces nutritious high 6.4% protein leaves that taste like peas. It is one of the most popular leaf vegetables in South Asia and Southeast Asia and is notable for high yields and flavor. The shoot tips have been sold as tropical asparagus. In Vietnam, the locals cook it with crab meat, minced pork or dried shrimp to make soup. In Malaysia, it is commonly stir-fried with egg or dried anchovies. The flowers and small purplish fruits of the plant have also been eaten. In Indonesia, the leaves of the plant are used to make infusion, believed to improve the flow of breast milk for breastfeeding mothers.

Common Names

Sweet Leaf Bush, Chekkurmenis, Chekup Manis, Changkok Manis, Japanese Malungay

Nutrition

In 100 g of leaves the nutritional content is as follows: energy 59 cal, 6.4 g protein, 1.0 g fat, 9.9 g carbohydrate, 1.5 g fiber, 1.7 g ash, 233 mg calcium, phosphorus 98 mg, 3.5 mg iron, carotene 10,020 mcg (vitamin A), B, and C 164 mg, and 81 g water.

Uses

It is eaten in Asia, both raw and cooked. The shrub is cultivated in shaded areas, irrigated frequently and fertilized to produce rapidly growing tender tips that are similar to asparagus. The plant is highly nutritious with about half of its nutrition as protein!

Katuk can be used in stirfrys, fresh salads and mixed into morning egg dishes. If you have a bunch of leaves, throw them in a frying pan with a little coconut oil or pork fat, garlic and salt. It's a perfect side dish. It's served in thousands of restaurants in Southeast Asia. The berries that are either white or salmon pink when ripe, can be eaten like peas or tossed in salads and stirfry.

Toxicity

Excessive consumption of raw katuk for weeks on end may not be good for you. It contains a compound named Papaverine that lowers blood pressure and has a string of other medicinal and pharmacological uses. There is about 580 mg of papaverine per 100g of raw Katuk leaf, or about the same as four prescriptions capsules of papaverine to 3 ounces of raw leaf. The theory is in high doses it permanently damaged the tiny blood vessels in the lung.

Growing

Katuk will tolerate acidic soil, heavy clay soils. Due to its natural jungle under-story habitat, it prefers some shade. The easiest way to get it going is to get some cuttings. They root easily in moist soil. They also root well in aquaponics systems. I've never seen seeds for sale but many sites online sell cuttings and plants.

It's shoots can be regularly pruned close to the ground(all the way to 6 inches). It will always regenerate. Since the preferred crop is the foliage, the plant requires nitrogen fertilizer or rich compost to encourage rapid growth after harvest. The plant seems to do the best when planted under the shade of the jungle canopy.

Growing a Katuk shrub is relatively easy, provided you live in an area of moist, hot conditions or can mimic such conditions in a greenhouse. When growing a Katuk shrub, it will do best in a shaded area, just like the understory of the rainforest it is native to, but it will also do well in full sun provided you keep the soil damp.

Propagation

Katuk is easily propagated via cuttings set in water or put directly into the soil in a moist shady area. Apparently, the shrub can grow up to a foot a week in ideal conditions, although it has a tendency to flop over when it gets too tall. For this reason and to encourage tender new shoots, regular pruning is done by Asian cultivators.

Pests

This shrub seems to be remarkably pest free.

Survival Gardener - <http://survivalgardener.com/katuk-sweet-leaf-bush/>

Gardening Know How - <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/ornamental/shrubs/katuk/growing-katuk-shrubs.htm>