
Jute

BUSH OKRA, TUSSA JUTE, JUTE MALLOW

Corchorus olitorius

Tiliaceae family

ECHO PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

ORIGIN –Jute is native to Africa where it is widely cultivated in both wet regions of the Sub-Sahara and drier areas of North Africa. This crop is also grown in the Middle East and Asia. In Australia and Egypt it has become a weed.

USES – Considered a fiber crop by many, jute is a valuable food crop. The leaves and growing tips are most commonly used as a leafy green vegetable and are particularly valuable in hot, rainy months when brassicas such as collard, kale and cabbage are unable to grow. Leaves are shredded and made into a paste or the pods of the plant are eaten when immature. Jute can also be dried, ground into powder and stored for use during the dry season. It also has many uses in folk medicine.

CULTIVATION -Jute is propagated by seed. The seed typically requires scarification to begin germination or seeds may be soaked in boiling water for ten seconds, then planted into raised beds 1 m. wide. If the plant is to be harvested by uprooting, seeds should be planted with a 30-50 cm. row spacing. If leaves will be harvested by pruning, seedlings that have reached a height of 10 cm. should be transplanted into rows and spaced 30-50 cm. apart. Cow dung, wood ashes, rotted water hyacinth or its ashes may be used to enrich the soil. Leaf production improves with increases in water availability. Under cultivation, jute is grown as an annual, though it may act as a perennial in some locations. It can be planted at the beginning of the rainy season and will withstand the hot, humid months. It can also withstand some drought conditions.

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HARVESTING AND SEED PRODUCTION – Leaves and young shoots can be pruned from the plant as they emerge and are most desirable when young. Growth will continue and edible portions can be harvested continuously. Plants may also be uprooted and leaves removed from the stem for cooking. Fruit should be harvested when immature and tender. Jute is typically self-pollinating, though some out-crossing is possible. An isolation distance of 15 m. between cultivars is recommended for seed production. Fruits should be allowed to dry on the stock, usually for 6 weeks after flowering. Dried pods can be beaten or threshed to release seeds.

PESTS AND DISEASES – The most serious pests of jute are nematodes and leaf-eating beetles and caterpillars. Insect pest populations are usually suppressed by sufficient rains, though they can be controlled by the application of pesticides. Nematodes are controlled by common nematode suppression practices such as crop rotation and the addition of manure and other organic matter to the soil. There are no serious disease problems of jute.

COOKING AND NUTRITION –Jute is an excellent addition to high starch diets as it contains high levels of protein and vitamin C. Young leaves and shoot tips can be eaten raw or cooked. If cooked, leaves are used to make a “jute soup” by boiling sliced leaves over low heat. Leaves may be mashed while cooking and other vegetables or melon seeds added to create a thick soup or relish that is eaten with starchy staples such as sadza or rice. Leaves may also be dried for storage and added to soups and other dishes at a later time.

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