

Introduction of Bottle Gourd and Bitter Melon to Tennessee

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Bitter Melon, *Momordica charantia*, is a member of the squash family and is very popular in Asian, African, Caribbean, Indian and Middle Eastern countries. Bitter Melon has a bumpy skin and ranges from light to dark yellowish green in color and oblong in shape as the bitter melon matures and ripens it turns yellow-orange. Ripen fruits are bitter in taste.

Bitter Melon is very common in Asian and Indian dishes. In Chinese cooking, Bitter Melon is usually stir fried with pork, used in soups and consumed as a tea. In Northern Indian Bitter Melon can be stuffed with spices and prepared by cooking in oil. It is prepared or served with yogurt to offset the bitterness. In Southern India, Bitter Melon is mixed with coconut and stir-fried with various spices. In the Caribbean, Bitter Melon is sautéed with onion, garlic until crisp.



Bitter Melon
 Nutritional Value (per 100 gm)
 Calcium-20 mg
 Phosphorus-70 mg
 Iron-1.8 mg
 Vitamin C-88 mg
 Small amount of Vitamin B

Medicinal uses: Bitter Melon has been used in Asian, African and India as herbal medicine. Benefits and usages of Bitter Melon (fruit and young leaves and stems) are to relieve diabetes, digestive problems, laxatives, heart problems, anti-cancer properties, anti-aging properties, skin infections, regulates blood flow, respiratory diseases, wounds, gout, ulcers, rheumatism and slows the grey of hair. When consumed as a juice, Bitter Melon can lower blood glucose levels but does not significantly decrease fasting blood glucose levels or A1C, when taken in capsule or tablet form. (Ooi, Yassin, and Hamid, 2012). However, pregnant women should avoid Bitter Melon.

Growing Bitter Melon: Bitter Melon can be grown in Tennessee, start seeds directly in the soil in late spring/ early summer. Bitter Melon varieties are trailers and benefit from growing on a trellis and easy to harvest. The plant benefits from an all purpose fertilizer 20-20-20 NPK, fruits are ready to harvest from 40-63 days depending on the variety. Harvest fruit, when they are small and skin is green in color, they are less bitter. Bitter Melon is a herbaceous vine, each plant has separate male and female flowers. Bitter Melon is a subtropical and tropical vine from the family of Cucurbitaceae. The skin is tender and edible, the seeds and pith appear white in unripe fruit.



Chinese Bitter Melon



Bottle Gourd

Bottle Gourd, *Lagenaria siceraria*, which is vine grown for its fruit, harvested when young. The fruit has a light-green smooth skin with white flesh. Rounder varieties are known as Calabash gourds, these gourds vary in shapes (huge and round, small and bottle shaped or slimmed). Bottle gourds was one of the earliest cultivated plants but was used as water containers and musical instruments. The Bottle Gourd originated in Africa, migrated to Asia, Europe and the Americas. The history of the usage of Bottle Gourds have been recorded as far back as 11,000 years ago.

Medicinal uses: Bottle Gourds have exceptional health benefits, especially on High Blood Pressure and Heart Diseases. Bottle Gourds helps Liver functions, treats the burning sensation in the Urinary Passage when mixed with Lime juice. Relives constipation, soothes the stomach from acidity, indigestion and ulcers. In Indian Traditional medicines, Bottle Gourd is used as an nerve tonic.

Bottle Gourd is exceptional as a weight loss food since it contains between 95% and 97% water and has 12 calories per 100g serving.

Bottle Gourd is high in thiamin, vitamin C, Zinc, Iron and Magnesium.