

Luffa

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Classification

- Luffa comes from the family *Cucurbitaceae*
- Same family as cucumbers-also related to pumpkins and squash
- Genus of other tropical and subtropical vines
- Two most common species: *L. aegyptiaca* and *L. acutangula*



Description



- Luffa is a fibrous plant seed pod.
- It is a “cucurbit” plant which means that it comes from a group of plants including gourds, pumpkins and cucumbers.
- The green fruits that develop on a vine grow into a seed pod filled with many intertwined cellulose fibers.
- When you remove the outer skin, the “luffa” part of the plant is revealed.

Origin

- Luffa is said to be an “Old World” plant
- It is native to Asia and Africa/Old World Tropics
- It is believed that Egyptians used to use the Luffa as a sponge
- The Luffa traveled to America about 10,000 years ago



Geography of Cultivation



- The Luffa plant typically will grow just about anywhere in the US...however, it prefers the Southern part of the United States.
- If it is grown in the Northern regions, it will never reach fully ripe before the first frost hits because of its long growing season.
- Although the Luffa plant can be grown in the US, and many people do grow it here, Japan is the world's biggest producer of this plant. Other countries like India and China are also big producers.

Cultivation

- Their seeds can be slow to germinate but once they do, luffa does not grow like a typical garden plant.
- They grow for a longer time than most gourds.
- The luffa plant prefers hot weather so if it is grown in a colder climate, it will grow at an extra slow rate.
- Luffa vines can grow to 30 feet or longer over the whole growing season.
- Once a fruit appears, it may take a long time to fully develop fibers and dry for harvest. Young luffa fruits are used for eating when they are still small and green. Older ones are dried out to be sponges.

Uses

- It's fibers can be boiled in water and used as medicine.
- It is commonly used in treating and preventing colds, arthritis, muscle and chest pain. It can also help nursing mothers increase milk flow. (PubMed)
- Used to exfoliate the skin-will remove the dead skin cells and reveal a new layer of skin
- Used as a sponge to wash and scrub pots, pans and glassware

Historical Facts

- In World War II, most of the US luffa production was used to make filters in the ship boilers
- Until the mid-1700s, the Luffa was classified as a sponge and it was believed to come from the sea. It wasn't until later that they classified it as a plant and discovered how closely related it was to plants like cucumbers.



Other Facts

- Although some types of luffa are edible, the more bitter types should not be eaten because there have been reports of them being poisonous.
- Luffa can be used for insulation and pillow stuffing.
- People commonly use Luffa as a back scratcher if it does not ripen for other uses during the growing season.



Sources

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