



Luffa: The all purpose vegetable.

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My summer kitchen garden is never complete without a luffa vine.

Of all the vegetables I find luffa, the most useful and gratifying.

Each year, I keenly wait for the summer to plant my luffa seeds.

Luffa is a member of the Cucurbitaceae family, other members of which include melons, gourds and squash.

It is an annual, fast growing tropical-semitropical vine with large leaves and green fruits that turn yellow or brown when ripe. The fruit is edible while immature, and mature fruit is used as body scrubs and exfoliate. The seeds yield edible oil.

The plant most likely originated in India, but is also native to Africa. Arabs call it 'luff'. Its most common use is as a toiletry item in Egypt. The wild form of angled luffa is indigenous to Indo-Pakistan.

Luffa seeds have been found in both Roman and Egyptian archaeology sites, and it has been used as in WWII in surgical operations, as a filter in the, as cushioning material in vehicle seats and heat insulation.

Luffa is not only delicious but also very rewarding, and fun thing to have in your garden. The vine can grow to great lengths producing beautiful yellow flowers all summer. When the vines bloom, bees of all types and other pollinating insects are attracted to the big yellow flowers. If the vine is loaded with flowers you can even hear humming of bees. Ants also spend a lot of time on luffa vines. Seeds for this plant are readily available and you only have to buy seeds once, as mature Luffa will produce at least 30 seeds. I have collected more than 100 seeds from one big mature luffa.

Luffa is a hot weather plant. It grows very easily here in Pakistan. In fact as soon as the spring arrives, you can see luffa seeds sprouting, which were spilled on ground from last year harvest.

Plant requires full sun. Mature seeds are typically dark and hard. Luffa seeds look similar to watermelon seeds but, with bitter taste. Luffa can be grown by directly planting into the ground as soon as the weather turns warm. Plant 3 to 4 seeds about 1/2 inch deep in small hills of soil. It takes 4 to 5 days for fresh seeds to germinate in ideal conditions.

Luffa can also be grown in 3 to 5 gallon size container with good drainage. It best to put container, where you want as it, can't be moved once the vines attach tendrils to other objects. It requires trellis or other support structure. The vine scrambles over anything in its path. It will climb over most obstacles. And if unchecked they will grow over near by trees and ever thing which comes in its way. The vines can also be grow on the ground, on a well drained soil, but tend to produce curved fruit.

Provide this plant with lots of sun and don't let the soil get too dry. Luffa plants prefer good well drained soil but seem to tolerate a fairly wide range of soil type's .once the plants send out the first normal leaf or two, the luffa saplings are ready to transplant. The plant is sensitive to transplant shock so be careful when planting.

It takes about three or four months until the fruits can be harvested for eating, and about four or five for harvesting of the mature fruit for sponge purpose and seeds.

The pollinated base will develop into luffah .The growth is remarkably rapid. One day it is inch long and after two days it's ready to pluck.

Dish Cloth Sponge, is material obtained from the fruit of the sponge luffa. The fibrous skeleton of the luffa is used as a sponge and to exfoliate the skin. The sponges should be allowed to dry completely because they have been found to support the growth of numerous bacteria.

The fruit should be harvested at maturity, when the fruit loses its green color (most will turn brown) and the seeds will rattle when it is shaken. The fruit can be cut from the vine and the skin peeled, and seeds removed.

Young fruit can be eaten raw like cucumber or in salads or cooked, while the young.

Luffa 'sponge' is rubbed against the skin to remove dead skin and stimulate blood circulation. Luffa charcoal, which is prepared by heating luffa fibers, is applied directly to the skin for shingles in the face and eye region.

Powdered luffa is used in skin care products to reduce swelling and 'detoxify' the skin. Luffa is an astringent, pain killing herb that controls bleeding and promotes healing, while at the same time boosting circulation.

It is used for rheumatism, backache, internal hemorrhage, chest pains, as well as hemorrhoids. Some people use it for arthritis pain and muscle pain.

Luffa is taken for treating and preventing colds. It is also used for nasal swelling and sinus problems. Women use luffa to restore absent menstrual periods. Nursing mothers use it to increase milk flow.

Enjoy this amazing vegetable this summer, and save some mature ones for sponge and seeds for next year harvest.

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