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The chayote has been grown in Florida for many years to a limited extent. While native to Guatemala, it is popular throughout tropical regions, where it is known by several names including “vegetable pear,” “mirliton,” and “mango squash.”

It is a tender, perennial-rooted cucurbit, with climbing vine and leaves resembling those of its cousin, the cucumber. The light green, pear-shaped fruit, which contains a single, flat edible seed, may weigh as much as two or three pounds. While fruits may be slightly grooved and prickly, those in Florida are usually smooth. A root-like, starchy tuber (also edible) forms under the crown. In most cases, it is the fruit for which the plant is grown.

Main varieties are Florida Green, Monticello White and imports.

Culture

Supports – Some type of trellis or support for the climbing vines is required. Most trellises in Florida have been constructed about head high to facilitate walking beneath the vines for harvesting and other operations. Other types of support, such as a single-row, angle-staked trellis might work as well.

Seeds – The whole fruit is planted as a seed. Each fruit has a single large, close-fitting seed which sprouts as soon as the fruit reaches maturity unless placed in cool storage. Fruits stored at 50° to 55° F should be completely covered with soil to protect the bud from cold damage.

Planting – The entire fruits are planted one-per-hill in hills spaced 12 feet apart in rows spaced 12 feet apart. The fruit is placed on its side with the smaller, stem-end sloping upward. While the stem-end is often left slightly exposed, in colder areas of Florida growers have found that the fruit should be completely covered with soil to protect the bud from cold damage.

Fertilizing – Well rotted animal manures or composted materials are beneficial. On most sandy soils, about three pounds of 6-8-8 fertilizer per plant should be applied in three applications one pound at a time, one pound in the middle of the summer and one pound when fruits are small. Fertilizing at more frequent intervals might be necessary when conditions warrant.

Use – The chayote may be served in many ways, creamed, buttered, fried, stuffed, baked, frittered, boiled, mashed, pickled, in salads, or in pies. Commercially, the biggest market appears to be for pickling.

Storage – Fruits may be stored in edible condition for several weeks if wrapped in newspaper and kept cool (50° - 55°F). At room temperature, the fruit will shrivel and sprout. The longer the fruits are stored, the poorer the quality becomes.

From The Manual of Minor Vegetables by James M. Stephens