

# ACHOCHA

(Cyclanthera species)



- A food crop grown by the Incas in South America. A member of the Cucurbit family, which includes squash & cucumbers, requires similar growing conditions grow.
- It is an extremely vigorous climber, 5 or 6 m with ease before it gets cut down with Autumn frosts in the UK.
- The fruits are an odd shape rather like Turkish shoes or as in Mexico, as “ladies slippers”. The taste is rather like a cucumber when eaten raw, while if stir fried, rather like a sweet green pepper.
- Medicinal benefits of Achocha. It is claimed that it is capable of lowering cholesterol levels when eaten.
- The plants produce male and female flowers in July/August and pollination is carried out by swarms of hover flies.
- The large jagged seeds are best started in pots in heat in April, by lightly covering them in compost. Then transfer the seedlings to a cool greenhouse or frost free place to harden off. Only transplant them to their final location once all danger of frost is past, say June, and it would still be a good idea to provide cloche protection for several weeks in the North of the UK. Allow the plants to clamber up a hedge or fence in a sunny position.
- Fruits are best eaten while they are still under 2 cm long and are soft and tender. When they become full sized, about 5 cm long, the outer flesh is stringy & the large seeds would need to be removed, once seed is removed you can stuff the fruits or cream cheese.
- They can be eaten raw while still tender, or lightly stir fried or steamed.
- Saving Achocha seeds is easy if you allow some fruits to mature. Scrape the dark jagged seeds from the fruit and dry on kitchen paper.

### There are several species of Achocha available

- Fat Baby. (Cyclanthera brachystachya)

This is apparently the easiest one to grow outdoors in the UK. The fruits grow singly.

- Ladies Slippers. (Cyclanthera pedata)

The fruits usually appear in two's and grows successfully up North.

- 'Caigua' Achocha (Cyclanthera pedata)

This is a large fruited version 10 to 20 cm long and used for stuffing. This one is likely to be more productive when grown in a greenhouse or poly tunnel, rather than outside.

- Exploding Cucumber. (Cyclanthera explodens)

This is another related species of Achocha which spreads the seeds around by bursting open and “exploding” to hurl the seeds some distance. The fruits are about half the size of Fat Baby. Care should be taken when collecting & preparing fruits in case they explode.