



Poha

Family: Solanaceae

Scientific name: *Physalis peruviana* L.

Common names: poha, cape gooseberry, ground cherry, husk tomato

Description

Poha is a low-growing, herbaceous plant to 3 ft high with velvety, heart-shaped leaves 4–6 inches long and yellow, bell-shaped flowers. The mature fruit is orange skinned, round, $\frac{1}{2}$ –1 inch in diameter, and enclosed in a tan, papery sack. Fruits are many seeded, juicy, sweet, and tangy, with a high vitamin C content. The plant has a shallow, fibrous root system.

Occurrence

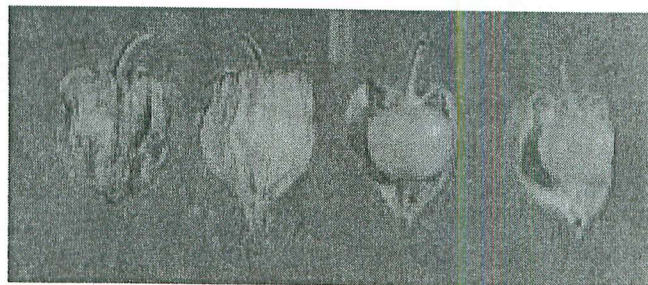
Poha occurs at high elevations in the tropics as a perennial and in temperate zones as an annual. In Hawaii it has become naturalized and occurs spontaneously on open mountain slopes at elevations between 1500 and 4000 feet. Plants grow well below 1500 feet but fruit size decreases with decreasing elevation.

Use

Poha fruit is eaten fresh or is prepared as jam. It is sometimes canned in heavy sugar syrup. It is also an excellent flavoring for ice cream. Poha is grown commercially in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, usually as an annual crop.

Location

Poha grows best in full sunlight and requires well-drained soils with a pH of 5.0 to 6.5. Pohas can produce good growth in relatively poor soils if they are well drained. Fertile soils may favor vegetative growth over fruit production. Areas suitable for tomato production are generally suitable for poha. Relatively dry weather



Mature poha fruits in husk (left) and with husk partly removed (right).

during fruit maturation favors higher yields. In vegetative and fruit development stages of growth, irrigation may be desirable during dry periods.

Harvest

Fruit is ready for picking from three to five months after transplanting seedlings to the field. Fruits should be picked when husks turn from green to a straw-yellow color, or they should be allowed to fall and be picked up from the ground at three- to five-day intervals. To avoid wet husks, picking is best done late in the day after the dew has dried.

Harvesting is labor intensive and therefore may be a major cost in poha production. To save time and labor, polyethylene sheets may be spread along the plant rows at harvest; the plants are shaken and fruits fall on the sheet, which is then pulled out; and the fruits are dumped into containers.

Postharvest

After picking, the fruits are spread out to dry overnight or longer to reduce moisture and minimize mildew formation. Poha berries stay in good condition for seven to 10 days if kept cool and dry. For retail sales, poha berries are usually marketed in the husk.

*Replaces HITAHR Commodity Fact Sheet POHA-3(A), 1987.