

Chinese Long Bean, Yard-Long Bean, Asparagus Bean

Vigna unguiculata subspecies *sesquipedalis* is a member of the Fabaceae (pea) family.

Chinese long bean is an annual climbing plant. A cousin to the cowpea or black-eyed pea, Chinese long bean is much more of a trailing, climbing variety, and often reaches heights of 9 to 12 feet. The pods grow to 12 to 30 inches long. The plant has large yellow to violet-blue flowers. Chinese long bean is an indeterminate plant: it continues to grow even after flowering and fruiting.

Other names. *Taao-hla-chao* (Hmong); *jurokusagemae* (Japanese); *dow gauk* (Chinese); *sitaw* (Filipino); *dau-dua* (Vietnamese).

Market Information

It is easy to make long beans look bad at market — old, dry beans look terrible and will sell poorly.

Current production and yield. Chinese long beans are available year-round from the Caribbean, Mexico, and California. Peak supplies are in the late summer or early fall. In a field test at Riverside, researchers obtained marketable yields of 7,500 to 11,100 pounds per acre with three different cultivars. Based upon the plants and their fruiting condition at the end of the harvest as well as the indeterminate nature of the crop, the potential yield was probably greater.

Use. Pick the pods at maximum length but when they are still smooth, before the seeds mature or expand. At this tender stage, they can be snapped and cooked in various ways: stewed with tomato sauce; boiled and drained, and then seasoned with lemon juice and oil; or simmered in butter or oil and garlic. The pale green bean is meatier and sweeter than the dark green bean, which has a less delicate taste.

Culture

Climatic requirements. This warm-season crop can be planted in a wide range of climatic conditions, but is very sensitive to cold temperatures. It can tolerate heat, low rainfall, and arid soils, but the pods become short and fibrous with low soil moisture. Chinese long beans prefer high temperatures, conditions under which other green beans cannot be produced.



Three different-colored cultivars of long bean.
(Photo: Charlotte Glenn)



Long beans packed for the Los Angeles wholesale market.
(Photo: Hunter Johnson)

Propagation and care. Plant seeds 1 to 2 inches deep in late spring when the soil is warm. Thin the plants to 6 to 12 inches in the row with 4 to 5 feet between rows. Since the long bean is a legume, some growers inoculate the seed with nitrogen-fixing *Rhizobium* bacteria rather than apply nitrogen fertilizer. For long beans, use the cowpea or "EL" strain of inoculant commercially available from various sources.

The plant's long, trailing growth habit requires a trellis for best production. Training the vines requires labor, about as much as for tomatoes or peas. The plant will climb by itself, but still needs some help and a very strong trellis system. The vines will grow to the top of your trellis, so don't build the trellis so high that it makes harvesting too difficult. Various trellising systems can be used. Chinese long beans will climb poles, especially if they are not entirely vertical and the poles are $\frac{3}{4}$ to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, but the plants must be trained to the poles early in the season.

Fruits grow from open flower to marketable length in about 9 days. If the seed was not inoculated with a *Rhizobium*, high-nitrogen fertilizer may be required when seeding and during the

growing season. A field test at Riverside supplied 3 inches of water and 10 pounds of nitrogen per acre per week. Long beans require more water than cowpeas.

Aphids, particularly the black bean aphid (*Aphis fabae*), are drawn to the pods of this plant. If you plant long beans near other crops that are infested with this aphid, you are asking for trouble. Thrips tend to be a pest early in the season, but the plants will often outgrow them, especially as the weather gets warmer and the plants grow faster. Mites can be a problem, primarily after insecticide applications, which often lead to mite outbreaks.

Harvest and postharvest practices. Harvested beans develop rusty patches quickly. Keep harvested beans moist while in coolers, since dehydration in the coolers will lower quality and may make them unmarketable. Old or wilted long beans are unmarketable. Sell the beans as fresh as possible.

The USDA storage recommendation is 40° to 45°F at 90 to 95% relative humidity, with an approximate storage life of 7 to 10 days.

Sources

Seed

- Seeds Blüm, Idaho City Stage, Boise, ID 83706
 Sunrise Enterprises, P.O. Box 10058, Elmwood, CT 06110-0058
 Tsang and Ma, P.O. Box 5644, Redwood City, CA 94063

More information

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 Rubatzky, Vincent, and Mas Yamaguchi. 1997. *World vegetables, 2d ed.* Chapman and Hall, New York, NY.
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