

Kiwano, African Horned Cucumber or Melon, Jelly Melon

Cucumis metuliferus is a member of the Cucurbitaceae (gourd) family.

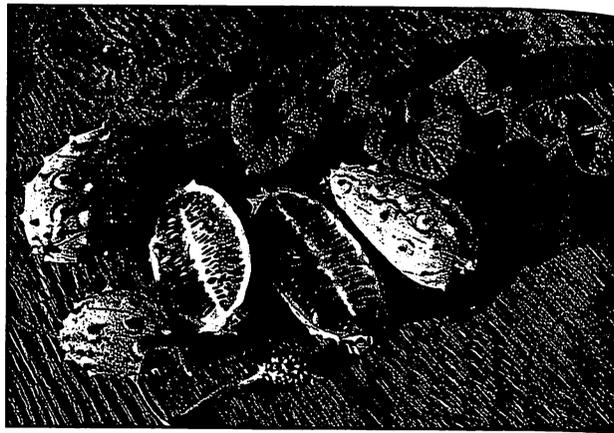
The horned melon plant is a vine of African origin growing 5 to 10 feet long. The stem is angular, ridged, and hairy; internodes are 2 to 3 inches long. At each node, a 1- or 2-inch-long curling tendril forms along with two to four pale yellow male flowers, a leaf petiole, and occasionally a fruiting branch. The small, deeply cut, five-lobed leaves are similar to those of the watermelon. The fruits are oblong and 2 to 4 inches long when mature, and have long, sharp exterior spines. Immature fruits are light green. When they mature, they turn a bright orange on the outside, with green inner flesh.

Market Information

The name "kiwano" is a registered trademark of Prinut Inc., which imports the horned melon from New Zealand. It's been grown in New Zealand since the mid 1980s. Frieda's Finest Produce Specialties of Los Angeles markets the kiwano in the United States. It is available year-round from New Zealand and California. Some marketers claim that California-grown horned melons are not sweet enough.

A New Zealand grower reported a yield of 200,000 10-pound trays of fruit from 50 acres, but an 18-acre planting at Los Baños, California, yielded only 12,000 trays.

Use. The spiny fruits have a bland citrus or banana-like flavor. The flesh of the ripe interior is lime green and jelly-like, with large seeds. The abundant, large, sticky seeds make the fruit difficult to use. The pulp can be strained for juice. The fruit turns bright orange when it is ripe. Horned melon is marketed as a garnish or for decorative purposes.



Kiwano fruits are 2 to 4 inches long at maturity. (Photo: Hunter Johnson)

Culture

Climatic requirements. The plant is sensitive to cold, and will only grow during the warm seasons. Hot, dry conditions prevent powdery mildew.

Propagation and care. The plants grow very much like cucumbers. Be cautious when you grow them, since they have a "weedy" nature; robust and vigorous climbers, they can spread quickly. Fruits form in clusters; those closest to the center mature first. Wear gloves when cutting fruit from the vine, and avoid puncturing neighboring fruit with the spines. Harvest and packing are time- and labor-intensive.

Harvest and postharvest handling. The USDA storage recommendation is 50° to 60°F at 90% relative humidity, with an approximate storage life of 6 months. Do not stack the fruit, since the spines are likely to puncture other fruit. In New Zealand, the spines are made blunt with sandpaper or a file.

Sources

Seed

Seeds Blüm, Idaho City Stage, Boise, ID 83706

More information

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The Packer. 1990. *1990 produce availability and marketing guide*. Vance Publishing Corp., Overland Park, KS.

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