

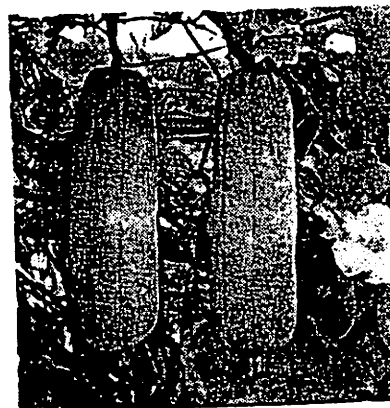
LUFFA 絲瓜

93-3-1

(*Luffa cylindrica* and *L. acutangula*)
(Other names: Chinese Okra, Sponge Plant, Cee Gwa)

There are many species of Luffa, two of which are commonly cultivated as vegetables. Both are Asiatic in origin. Luffa is a fast growing vine which climbs up to 15 feet high by means of tendrils with several branches. Leaves are broad and large with five lobes. The stem is square or 5 angled. Male and female parts are on different flowers, both are yellow in color. Flowers open in the morning. If not pollinated, the female flower will remain open for 24 hours. For a good yield, flowers may be hand pollinated in the early morning. Fruits vary in size, shape, and length. Seeds are flat and black. There are two different species based on the character of the skin of the fruits - smooth luffa and angled luffa.

A. SMOOTH LUFFA (*Luffa cylindrica*): (Other names: Sponge Plant, Dish Cloth Gourd, Shih Kua, Cee Kwa). The fruits of smooth Luffa vary in size from a few ounces to 5 pounds and have a relatively smooth skin. The mature fruits are light green in color, cylindrical, smooth skinned, and 2-3 inches in diameter.



HOW TO GROW: Best grown in rich, organic, sandy loam and moist soil. Start seeds indoors for transplanting, or sow seeds in hills in the garden-- 6 seeds per hill spaced 2 feet apart in all directions. Plant seeds 1 inch deep. Seeds germinate in 12-18 days. Because seeds are very hard coated, extra heat speeds germination, as does overnight soaking. After the seedlings are about 4 inches tall, transplant to open field or thin to the 3 strongest per hill. Tie plants to a trellis or other support. It is advisable to plant them next to a fence or south side of a small tree for climbing. Be sure that the plants are not too close to the tree or in the shade.

WHEN TO PLANT: In the northern U.S. start seeds indoors in the early spring or plant seeds in the garden after the danger of frost is over.

CARE AND HARVEST: Water luffa frequently, particularly in hot summer. Fertilize by side dressing with ordinary garden fertilizer every 2-3 weeks. Lack of water or fertilizer results in fruits that are small, less numerous and of poor quality. Harvest as vegetables 90 days after planting and 120 days more for mature fruits. For kitchen use, pick up young fruits with tender skin.

VARIETIES: Based on the sizes of the fruits there are three varieties:

1. **Short Cylinder:** Early variety. Fruits are 8 inches in length and 4' diameter. Hi
2. **Bamboo Stick:** Easy to grow. Suitable for family garden. Fruits are 16 inches in length and 4 inches in diameter, with a deep green, smooth skin.
3. **Long Cylinder:** Fruits are medium in size between the above two varieties.

USES: For use as vegetables, cook like zucchini or cucumber. Cut fruits into small pieces and fry with meats or other vegetables, or use in soup. They may be served raw in a salad. They are widely used as sponges for dish washing or as a back scrubber.

SPONGE MAKING: Extra sheet available upon request.

B. ANGLED LUFFA (*Luffa acutangula*): (Other names: Chinese Okra, Sing Kwa, Cee Kwa)

This luffa is similar in appearance to smooth luffa except for the shape and size of the fruits. Fruits are long and thin, 2-9 feet in length with ten raised ridges like okra, so it is called Chinese okra although it actually has no connection with okra.



HOW TO GROW & WHEN TO PLANT: Similar to Smooth Luffa.

CARE AND HARVEST: It should be harvested when the fruits are young for vegetable use. Not good as sponges.

VARIETIES: Based on the length of fruits there are three varieties:

1. **Short and thin:** Fruits are 10 inches long and 2 inches in diameter.
2. **Short and thick:** Fruits are about 18 inches long and 2 inches in diameter.
3. **Long and thin:** Fruits are more than 20 inches long and 1 inch in diameter.

RECIPES:

Sliced beef with luffa

Ingredients:

- 1 lb Young luffa, wash and peel skin. Slice into 1 inch square cubes.
- 1/2 lb Beef (flank steak), cut into 1 inch square slices.
- 5 tblsp Corn oil (or other vegetable oil)
- 2 pieces Bunching onion (scallion), cut 1 inch long
- 2 slices Ginger (thinly sliced)

- 1 tsp Sugar
 - 1 tblsp Soysauce
 - 2 tsp Corn starch
 - 1 clove Garlic, minced
 - 1 tblsp Cold water
- } Mix well

- Seasoning Sauce:**
- 1 tsp Sugar
 - 1/2 tblsp Soyauce
 - 1 tsp Salt
 - 1/2 tsp Cor starch
- } Mix well

Procedure:

1. Marinate beef in mixture of sugar, soysauce, corn starch, garlic and cold water for at least 30 minutes.
2. Heat corn oil (3 tablespoons) in frying pan until hot, add beef and stir quickly until the color of the beef disappears, about 10 seconds. Remove beef from frying pan and reserve.
3. Heat another 2 tablespoons of corn oil in the same pan to fry the bunching onions and ginger for a few seconds. Add the luffa. Stir fry. After 10 seconds add the beef and seasoning sauce. Stir quickly over high heat until mixed. Then serve hot.