

Bitter Melon (*Momordica charantia*)

Common Names: Bitter gourd, cerasee, karela, momordica and balsam pear.

Location: This herb can be found in Asia.

Description: The leaves, seeds and vines are all used medicinally, but the fruit is the prized portion of the herb.

Properties: This herb is widely known for its uses in treating diabetes and improving blood sugar and glucose tolerance.

Uses: Bitter Melon can be used to help treat diabetes, herpes and chronic fatigue syndrome.

Doses: Bitter Melon can be eaten, as well as taken in tinctures, extracts or juices.

Warnings: High amounts of bitter melon consumption can result in stomach pain and diarrhea. Bitter Melon should not be taken by those who are pregnant or those who experience hypoglycemia.

## **Bitter Melon Profile**

### **Also known as**

*Momordica charantia*, Bitter Gourd, Balsam Pear, Foo Gwa, Karela, Balsamina

### **Introduction**

The bitter melon is a tropical/subtropical herbaceous tendril bearing vine with yellow flowers, and is a member of the squash family. The fruit itself is oblong in shape with a pockmarked and warty exterior, looking like a cross between a cucumber and a gourd. It has a hollow cross section filled with large flat seeds and pith. Even though it produces the bitterest fruit the earth has to offer, it is in fact grown specifically for the cultivation of this fruit. It is widely grown and cultivated in Southeast Asia, China, Africa, and the Caribbean.

### **Constituents**

### **Parts Used**

The fruit in its entirety can be utilized. Generally the seeds and pith are removed to reduce the bitterness, but the seeds can be eaten, although they usually are not unless specifically called for in a recipe.

### **Typical Preparations**

Bitter compounds evolved in plants as a self defense mechanism to deter consumption by animals. Humans however have developed a palate for this. The bitter melon is typically stuffed, curried, or pickled. It can also be used in stir fries, soups, teas, and even beer. Garlic and chili peppers can be added to recipes to help offset the bitterness.

### **Summary**

The seeds, leaves, and vines have been used in traditional Chinese medicine for centuries, but the fruit is what is primarily used today. In the Compendium of Materia Medica by Li Shizhen (1518-1593) he described bitter melon as being able to "Expel evil heat, and relieve fatigue." It has also been used by many cultures as a male aphrodisiac, for infections, as a remedy for bad breath, boils, and lice. When added to a salve it may help reduce the itchy feeling associated with poison ivy. According to James Duke in his Green Pharmacy Herbal Handbook, there have been several clinical trials that have shown that bitter melon extract and juice lowered blood sugar in people with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Bitter melon contains gurmardin, a polypeptide considered to be quite similar to bovine insulin, which has been shown in experimental studies to achieve positive sugar regulating effects. It has been used in India as a folk remedy for diabetes mellitus for many years.

### **Precautions**

Because bitter melon may lower blood sugar, and insulin levels, it should NEVER be taken in conjunction with any form of diabetes medication, and then only under the supervision of a qualified physician. Avoid bitter melon during pregnancy. The seeds contain vicine, and may trigger symptoms of favism. Bitter melon may cause heartburn, stomach pain, and diarrhea, and make ulcers worse.