

The Edible and Delicious Ground Cherry

The ground cherry, Chinese lanterns, and tomatillos all have fruits enclosed in husks which eventually become dry and paper-like. All three fruits are edible when mature, but no one would encourage the consumption of the Chinese lantern fruit, and not many people "graze" on tomatillos while visiting the garden. If you plant ground cherries, it will be difficult to resist snacking on the mature fruit while you're checking the plants or harvesting the bounty. You might also enjoy drying ground cherries, making ground cherry jam or pie; or adding ground cherries to a cucumber-avocado salad dressed with a lemon vinaigrette.

If you can grow a tomato plant from seed, you can grow ground cherry plants. You'll be able to buy seed from many online and mail-order catalogues, some of which we mention at the end of the article. Other names by which the ground cherry is known include **dwarf Cape gooseberry** and **strawberry tomato**. Most plants will take at least 70 days from the time you transplant them into the garden to provide ripe fruit. A well-grown plant might yield several pounds of fruit. Start the plants when you start tomatoes and treat them the same way, except that you will not need to plan on staking or caging the plants. They sprawl, and will need to be planted a good two to three feet apart. The ideal soil is light and well-drained. Like tomato plants, ground cherry plants prefer warmth; and they may be even more frost-tender than tomato plants. They can be successfully grown in pots.

Be forewarned: in nitrogen-rich soil, ground cherry plants will put on lush growth but be skimpy with fruit. During their growth, be sure that the soil where ground cherries are planted does not dry out. The fruits may be hidden under the plant's branches. Just gently lift a branch to check to see if any fruits are mature. When the fruit is ripe, the husk wrapper will begin to dry a bit; the fruit will turn from green to a tan or golden color, and will often drop off the branch. Remove the wrapper, and if the fruit appears to be the right color, try it!

You're wondering what it tastes like, aren't you? Sorry. You'll just have to wait and see. Different folks have different reactions to this fruit, and we wouldn't want to predispose you....

Halpin, Anne Moyer, ed. *Gourmet Gardening*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1978, 1981.

[Cape Gooseberry](#). California Rare Fruit Growers.

[Cultivating a Taste for Ground Cherry Pie](#). Recipe Source.

[Tomatillos & Cape Gooseberries](#). Seed to Supper.

[Cape Gooseberry](#). Stellar Seeds.

[Cape Gooseberry](#). Fruits of Warm Climates, by Julia F. Morton.

[Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds](#), ground cherry (strawberry husk tomato), 50 seed packet, \$1.00 (#150); Golden Rusk, #151, 15 seed packet, \$1.40; Physalis Minima, #152, 25 seed packet, \$1.40.

[The Cook's Garden](#), Golden Tomatillo (Cape Gooseberry) #649, 0.25 g, \$1.95 (p.49 in print catalog)

[Ed Hume](#), ground cherry (husk tomato), 150 mg, \$1.29

[Nichols Garden Nursery](#), ground cherry, husk tomato, *Physalis pruinosa*, OP 75 da, 0.5 g packet, \$1.55, VHT236
(p. 37 in print catalog)

[Territorial Seed Company](#), Aunt Molly's ground cherry, 0.125 g sampler, \$1.90; 1 g packet, \$3.20, TM901