

*Citrullus colocynthis*

[Synonyms : *Colocynthis officinalis*, *Colocynthis vulgaris*, *Cucumis colocynthis*]

**BITTER APPLE** is a prostrate or climbing vine. Possibly native to Turkey, Africa and tropical Asia, it has tiny yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Bitterappel* (Dutch), Bitter cucumber, Bitter gourd, *Bitterzitrulle* (German), *Cocomero amaro* (Italian), *Colocíntida* (Brazilian, Portuguese), Colocynth, Colocynth pulp, *Coloquínta* (Spanish), *Coloquinte* (French), *Coloquíntida* (Portuguese, Spanish), *Coloquintide* (Italian), *Etipuchchha* (Telugu), Gall, *Handhal* (Arabic), *Indrayan* (Bengali, Hindi), *Indrenii* (Nepalese), *Inravarana* (Gujarati), *Kolocinto* (Esperanto), *Kolokvint* (Danish, Swedish), *Kolokvinta obecná* (Czech), *Kolokwint* (Dutch), *Kolokwintappel* (Dutch), *Koloquinte* (German), *Kwintappel* (Dutch), *Mahendra-varuni* (Sanskrit), *Peykom-mutti* (Malayalam), *Peyttum-matti* (Tamil), *Tuera* (Spanish), *Tuero* (Spanish), *Tumba* (Hindi), Vine of Sodom, and Wild gourd.

Warning – bitter apple is poisonous. The fruit pulp and seeds especially can cause blood deficiencies, fluid retention, kidney inflammation, weakness, skin pigmentation and death. It should not be taken by nursing mothers, and it should only be used by a qualified practitioner.

*Colocynthis* is derived from Greek *colocunthis* (round gourd).

Today's authorities believe that the water melon (*Citrullus lanatus*) was probably developed as a cultivated plant from the bitter apple.

The plant's cultivation goes back to the time of the Assyrians who set up trading colonies in about 1900 BC and remained a significant force until the empire's destruction in 609 BC. In the Bible (II Kings, 4.39) the bitter apple makes its appearance when, through ignorance, it was gathered and added to the pot – which would have had disastrous results if Elisha had not intervened.

In Sudan the pulp (sometimes mixed with black pepper, *Piper nigrum*) has been used as a moth deterrent. A substance also extracted from the fruit has been used to dress water bags to stop camels from tearing them open.

Medicinally, bitter apple's dried fruit pulp has been used since Assyrian times as a drastic purgative. Today it can be an ingredient in remedies for the treatment of constipation and painful periods. In India the root has been used in treatments for urinary illnesses, jaundice and rheumatism, and the fruit and root have provided a remedy for snake bites.