

Cucurbita ficifolia

[Synonyms : *Cucurbita melanosperma*, *Pepo ficifolia*]

FIG LEAF GOURD is a sparsely spiny, annual creeping/climbing vine. Probably native to Middle and South America it has yellow to pale orange flowers.

It is also known as *Abóbora-chila* (Portuguese), Black seeded gourd, Black seeded squash, *Calabaza cabellos de angel* (Spanish), *Chiberre* (Costa Rican, Honduran, Spanish), *Chilacayote* (Guatemalan, Mexican, Panamanian, Spanish), *Chiverri* (Costa Rican, Honduran), *Cidra*, *Courge à choucroute de cheveux d'ange* (French), *Courge à confiture* (French), *Courge à feuilles de figuier* (French), *Courge à graines noires* (French), *Courge de Siam* (French), *Dýně fíkolistá* (Czech), *Dynia figolistna* (Polish), *Feigenblattkürbis* (German), *Figenbladgræskar* (Danish), Fig-leaf squash, Fig-leaved gourd, Ivy-leaved gourd, *Kurodane kabocha* (Japanese), *Kürbis* (German), *Lacoyote* (Argentinian, Bolivian, Peruvian, Spanish), Malabar gourd, Malabar melon, Pie melon, *Sambo* (German), Siamese gourd, Sidra, Thai marrow, *Tambo* (German), *Tykev fíkolistá* (Czech), *Tzilacayote* (Mexican, Spanish), *Victoria* (Colombian), *Vitoria* (Colombian, Spanish), *Viigilehine kõrvits* (Estonian), Zambo (Ecuadorian, English, German, Spanish), *Zambu* (German), *Zucca del Malabar* (Italian), and *Zucca del Siam* (Italian).

The long white or green (or both) fruit can weigh up to 24 lb. According to authorities the ideal conditions for this vine's cultivation seem to defy many conventional factors and depend upon altitude ie. between 1,000 and 3,000 metres. Storage of the harvested fruit seems to be straightforward as without any special preparation the fruit will keep in the dry for about two years without deterioration – in fact some authorities believe the white flesh becomes sweeter with time.

Ficifolia is made up of the genus name *Ficus* and Latin *-folia* (leaved) components meaning 'with leaves like those of that (fig) genus'.

Archaeologists have found evidence in Peru that the vine was being cultivated there in about 3000 BC.

Young immature fruit are boiled as a vegetable (or some say eaten like cucumbers). In some areas the young stems and the flowers are cooked as a vegetable as well. The ripe fruit (with added sweetener) are boiled and eaten like squash (*Cucurbita maxima*) or used to make preserves and confectionery – and in Latin America the fruit flesh is also made into soft drinks and fermented for beer. The creamy white or dark brown to black seeds (which are rich in an edible oil and said to have a nutty taste) can be roasted like peanuts or eaten raw in puddings with honey.

In the South American Andean mountains and in parts of Asia (India especially) the ripe fruit are fed to livestock.

In temperate climates the vine is cultivated as an ornamental plant.

Recent Chilean research involving the fig leaf gourd has sparked interest from the fish food processing industry. It seems that enzymes identified in the fruit flesh could be useful in treating waste water produced by these industries which could be less expensive than present practice.

Medicinally, local herbalists have prescribed a diluted emulsion of the ground, fibrous-coated seeds for expelling worms.

