

*Cucurbita foetidissima*

[Synonyms : *Cucurbita perennis*, *Pepo foetidissima*]

**BUFFALO GOURD** is a creeping vine. Probably native to South America, Middle America and south-western North America, it has yellow flowers.

It is also known as Arizona gourd, *Calabacilla amarga* (Spanish), Calabazilla (English, Spanish), Calabrazilla, *Chilicote* (Spanish), Chilicote orange, Desert gourd, Fetid gourd, Fetid wild pumpkin, *Kukurubita foetisishima* (Japanese), Missouri gourd, Missouri pumpkin, Mock orange, *Niashiga maka* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), Prairie gourd, Stinking gourd, *Waganu pezhuta* (Dakota North American Indian), Wild gourd, and Wild pumpkin.

Old roots can weigh up to 320 lb. The seeds are 34% oil.

*Foetidissima* is derived from Latin *foeteo* (to stink, have a bad smell) meaning ‘very bad-smelling, fetid or stinking’.

Various American Indian tribes ate the cooked fruit and also stored them for food in Winter – and the washed seeds were eaten by many of the tribes such as the Luiseño and Isleta. The Cahuilla made a porridge out of the ground seeds and the Tohono O’Odham ate them roasted. For the Cahuilla the gourds served as cooking ladles.

Crushed root (or fruit pulp and seeds) provided a soap for the Kawaiisu, Cahuilla, Mahuna, Luiseño, Diegueño and Tohono O’Odham North American Indians to wash their clothes and the hides. (Early Settlers are said to have been insistent however on the need for extensive rinsing once the clothes had been washed as it was contended that any particles of the plant left on the material caused extreme skin irritation.) The Kiowa tribe are said to have rubbed dried fruit into stains before washing, to help remove them, and the Cahuilla Indians obtained a dye from the yellow blossom.

The ground leaves provided a green colouring for the ceremonial sand paintings made by some of the North American Apache Indians, and the Cahuilla tribe and some of the Keresan turned the gourds into ceremonial rattles.

Authorities note that the roots were fashioned into a wooden ball for a game played by the Havasupai North American Indians – and that girls in the tribe used the fruit for juggling.

Ground fruit shells were used as a hair shampoo by the Cahuilla Indians.

For some of the tribes such as the Missouri, Omaha or Ponca Indians however chroniclers have alleged that the fruit held special mystical properties. The root could only be dug up by those authorized so to do. Prayers and offerings had to be made to the plant’s spirit (the offerings were usually tobacco) and great care had to be taken to ensure that no part of the root was cut or bruised as it was raised. The root’s medicinal use was then determined by a doctrine of signatures type of dogma (not unlike that which became popular for some centuries in Europe) so that abdominal disorders were treated with the middle of the root, headaches with the top of it, etcetera.

The vine provided veterinary medicine for several North American Indian tribes. The Cahuilla, Coahuilla and some of the Apache used it externally to treat back sores on their horses, while the Shoshoni gave it to any horses suffering from worms.

Buffalo gourd was used by the North American Omaha Indians to encourage appetite. Some local tribes such as the Tewa used a boiled extract of the ground root as a laxative – and

the dried root provided a purgative for the Cahuilla Indians. The vine was used by the Kiowa tribe to cause vomiting when this was necessary, the Isleta Indians used it to treat some lung disorders and the Omaha prescribed it for various female problems. It was used externally for treating symptoms of some venereal diseases by the Shoshoni, and the Keresan, Zuni and Cahuilla tribes all applied it externally on ulcers, sores or swellings.