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Lycium pallidum

TOMATILLA is a deciduous shrub. Native to western North America it has small purple tinged, greenish-yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Kiapuli* (Zuni North American Indian), Pale desert thorn, Pale wolfberry, and Rabbit thorn.

Pallidum is Latin (pale, colourless).

The small scarlet berries were familiar to many North American Indian tribes who ate the fruit raw or cooked. From records the Zuni (for whom the plant was sacred), the Navajo, Isleta, and the Hopi Indians all ate the berries fresh. The Zuni tribe stewed them and Hopi Indians (who ate the fruit in times of famine) also made them into soup, porridge or preserves. Both the Navajo and Havasupai tribes stored the dried fruit for future use, particularly as Winter food – and they also made the dried berries into a drink. Keresan Indians cooked the berries to a syrup. Today in its native habitat the fruit are prized by many locally as a delicacy.

Both the Navajo and Hopi Indians used the shrub in rituals. For the former part of its role was the sacrifice of berries to the gods, and for the latter the shrub featured in a special annual ceremonial dance. Then for the Zuni Indians parts of tomatilla, worn or rubbed on the body, ensured safety from the enemy's arrows.

This shrub provided a cure for chickenpox for some of the Navajo Indians, and the tribe seems to have placed especial value on it as a cure for toothache as well.