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### *Momordica charantia*

[Synonyms : *Amara indica*, *Cucumis argyi*, *Momordica balsamina*, *Momordica chinensis*, *Momordica cylindrica*, *Momordica elegans*, *Momordica indica*, *Momordica operculata*, *Momordica sinensis*, *Sicyos fauriei*]

**BALSAM PEAR** is an annual climbing or scrambling vine. Native to tropical Asia and Africa it has small, bright yellow flowers.

It is also known as African cucumber, *Asowosi* (Creole), Balsam apple, *Balsambirne* (German), Bitter cucumber, Bitter gourd, Bitter melon, Carilla fruit, Cerasee vine, *Fu kwa* (Chinese), *Kakara* (Telugu), *Kakral* (Assamese), *Kantola* (Gujarati), *Kappakka* (Malayalam), *Karala* (Bengali), *Karawila* (Singhalese), *Karela* (Hindi, Punjabi), *Karvaskurkku* (Finnish), Leprosy gourd, Lizard's food, Maiden apple, Maiden's blush, *Mara* (Thai), Miraculous vine, *Mi'óp đắng* (Vietnamese), *Nyinya* (Twi), *Paival* (Tamil), *Pakal* (Tamil), *Pare* (Javanese), *Paria* (Sundanese), *Pavakai* (Tamil), *Peria* (Malay), Pomcooloo, *Pomme-coolie* (French), *Sushavi* (Sanskrit), and Wild balsam apple.

Warning - the leaf juice, the oblong yellowish-orange fruit (excluding the edible pulp) ie. the fruit casing or shell, and the seeds are poisonous. These can cause long lasting gastroenteritis, diarrhoea and vomiting. The plant juice can cause vomiting, diarrhoea and death for children.

*Charantia* is a name for this particular species used before the Swedish botanist, Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778) named it.

Balsam pear is believed to have been introduced to tropical America during the time of the Slave Trade by both slaves and traders.

In some areas of Peru the strongly-scented green leaves are cooked as a vegetable, and the warty waxy green unripe fruit are cooked and eaten and sometimes added to salads. The unripe fruit are also a familiar ingredient in Indian cookery, especially hotly-spiced dishes. The young fruit are also used to make pickles. In Indonesian Java and in the Philippines the young shoots and the flowers have been used as food flavouring.

Medicinally, the leaves and fruit have been used in local remedies for treating leprosy, diabetes, jaundice, fever, dysentery, diarrhoea, intestinal worms, burns and skin diseases. The fruit juice has provided an antidote for snake bites, the root has been used to treat piles, and the fruit (used in Chinese medicine) have been taken for stomach upsets.