

Phaseolus acutifolius var. *latifolius*

[Synonyms : *Phaseolus acutifolius* var. *tenuifolius*, *Phaseolus tenuifolius*]

TEPARY BEAN is a twining annual vine. Native to Mexico and south-western United States, it has pea-shaped, white to pale purple flowers.

It is also known as *Escomite* (Mexican), *Escumite* (Mexican), *Feijão-tepari* (Portuguese), *Frijol piñuelero* (Costa Rican), *Tépari* (Spanish), Tepari bean, Tepary, *Teparybohne* (German), Texas bean, and White tepary bush.

The plant is drought and disease resistant. The fruit pods explode when ripe and scatter the beans (which makes harvesting difficult). These highly nutritious beans can be of varying colours and shapes including small round-seeds (black or white), and large angular white, greenish-white, grey, dark-yellow, coffee-coloured, black, purple-mottled or mahogany-brown seeds.

Acutifolius is derived from Latin *acuti-* (pointed, acute, sharp) and *-folia* (leaved) components meaning ‘with sharply pointed leaves’. *Latifolius* is made up of Latin *lati-* (broad, wide) and *-folia* (leaved) components

This plant provides a vegetable in a couple of forms – both a young string bean and the tepary bean from the mature small pale beige fruit pod. (The latter like other similar beans needs to be soaked before they are boiled or baked and eaten.)

Some authorities note archaeological finds that indicate the tepary bean has been cultivated as a vegetable from at least 3000 BC. The Mayas of Middle America (basically 2000 BC-900 AD) called it *xmayum* and they ate the beans with the ubiquitous corn, *Zea* (which today’s dietitians recognise as a complementary combination that provides a healthy diet). The cultivated bean is believed to have reached the south-eastern United States by about 800. It was certainly familiar to several North American Indian tribes, not least some of the Tohono O’Odham and also some of the Keresan Indians. Hopi Indians ate the beans during periods of fasting. The Havasupai cooked the beans with corn or added them dried and ground to soup. They were also stored for use in Winter.

Apart from food the Keresan included bean flour in various roles in their rituals.

Today in the West tepary bean is becoming increasingly attractive to many authorities.

Researchers are examining it as a new food crop that could be grown successfully in arid climates in less well-developed regions outside its natural habitat – despite the problems associated with harvesting the beans unless they are of a cultivated variety that extends the period (often by several weeks) between initial maturity and the shattering of the pod for it to explosively expel the seeds (beans).

Once the beans have been harvested the remaining plant is used as fodder for livestock.