

*Physalis heterophylla*

[Synonyms : *Physalis ambigua*, *Physalis heterophylla* var. *ambigua*, *Physalis heterophylla* var. *clavipes*, *Physalis heterophylla* var. *heterophylla*, *Physalis heterophylla* var. *nyctaginea*, *Physalis heterophylla* var. *villosa*, *Physalis nyctaginea*, *Physalis sinuata*, *Physalis virginiana*]

**CLAMMY GROUNDCHERRY** is an annual or perennial. Native to south-eastern United States it has small purplish-centred, greenish-yellow flowers.

It is also known as Downy groundcherry, Ground cherry, Husk tomato, and Wild cherry.

The transparent and fragile, papery-thin, greenish-brown envelope surrounding the berry dries as the fruit ripens and drops to the ground when the fruit is ripe.

Warning – all parts (except the ripe fruit) are said to be poisonous (especially the leaves and unripe fruit). Animals normally avoid the plant unless other food is scarce.

This plant has been declared an invasive weed in many states in the United States.

*Heterophylla* is derived from Greek *hetero-* (different) and *phyllo-* (leaf) components meaning ‘furnished with leaves of different shapes’.

The small, yellow berries provided food for several North American Indian tribes including the Cherokee. When ripe they were eaten fresh by the Meskwaki and Cheyenne tribes, and the Pawnee, Ponca, Omaha and Dakota Indians all used them to make sauces and dried them for storage and Winter food as well.

Apparently Omaha, Kiowa and Ponca children all played with the berries. They burst them on their foreheads.

The plant offered a source of medicine for one or two North American Indian tribes including the Meskwaki. While some of the Dakota used it to enhance appetite the Iroquois took it to cause vomiting, used it for treating venereal disease and applied it in poultices to burns.

Locally the ripe fruit have been made into pies and jam.

Medicinally, local herbalists have relied upon the root for easing stomach upsets. A leaf tea has not only been taken as a remedy for headaches but also applied as a wash to soothe burns and scalds. The seeds have been used to treat urinary problems, fever and inflammation.