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Trichosanthes cucumerina

[Synonyms : *Trichosanthes anguina*, *Trichosanthes brevibracteata*, *Trichosanthes pachyrrhachis*]

SNAKE GOURD is an annual vine. Native to tropical Asia (particularly China) and to Australia, it has large fringed, white flowers.

It is also known as *Banpatol* (Bengali), *Buap ngu* (Thai), *Chetipotla* (Telugu), Club-gourd, *Dummella* (Singhalese), *Jangli-chachinda* (Hindi), *Katupolam* (Malayalam), *Mohahri* (Punjabi), *Pare welut* (Javanese), *Patola* (Sanskrit, Singhalese), *Petola ular* (Malay), *Podalangai* (Tamil), *Podivilangu* (Tamil), *Schlangengurke* (German), Serpent gourd, Snake cucumber, and Viper's gourd.

The flowers only open at night.

Cucumerina is derived from Latin *cucumis* (cucumber) meaning 'cucumber-like'.

From planting to the time of harvesting the slender, green or greenish-white and red fruit can be ready in three months. Today they can sometimes be seen in cultivation on a large scale.

This is said to be quite an unnerving sight for those unfamiliar with it as the fruit suggest the appearance of long snakes. On whatever scale they are grown however the young fruit are usually weighted down with a small stone to make them grow straight.

The unripe fruit are eaten locally as a vegetable – they are sliced and boiled as an accompaniment for hot spicy dishes.

Medicinally, a decoction of the leaf and stem are used locally for treating stomach upsets and skin disorders. A decoction of the roots is used to expel worms. The roots have also been found to show anti-viral qualities and these have been used to suppress the development of AIDS.