

# Luffa

<i>Luffa</i>	
	
Egyptian luffa with nearly mature fruit	
Scientific classification	
Kingdom:	Plantae
(unranked):	Angiosperms
(unranked):	Eudicots
(unranked):	Rosids
Order:	Cucurbitales
Family:	Cucurbitaceae
Subfamily:	Cucurbitoideae
Tribe:	Benincaseae
Subtribe:	<b>Luffinae</b>
Genus:	<i>Luffa</i> Tourn. <sup>[1]</sup>
Species	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Luffa acutangula</i> (Angled Luffa, Ridged Luffa, Vegetable Gourd)</li> <li>• <i>Luffa aegyptiaca</i> / <i>Luffa cylindrica</i> (Smooth Luffa, Egyptian Luffa, Dishrag Gourd, Gourd Loofa)</li> <li>• <i>Luffa operculata</i> (Wild Loofa, Sponge Cucumber)</li> </ul>	
Synonyms	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Poppya</i> Neck. ex M.Roem.</li> <li>• <i>Trevauxia</i> Steud., orth. var.</li> <li>• <i>Trevouxia</i> Scop.</li> <li>• <i>Turia</i> Forssk.</li> </ul>	

*Luffa* is a genus of tropical and subtropical vines classified in the cucumber (Cucurbitaceae) family. In everyday non-technical usage the name, also spelled **loofah**, usually refers to the fruit of the two species *Luffa aegyptiaca* and *Luffa acutangula*. The fruit of these species is cultivated and eaten as a vegetable. The fruit must be harvested at a young stage of development to be edible. The vegetable is popular in China and southeast Asia.<sup>[2]</sup> When the fruit is fully ripened it is very fibrous. The fully developed fruit is the source of the loofah scrubbing sponge which is used in bathrooms and kitchens as a sponge tool. *Luffa* are not frost-hardy, and require 150 to 200 warm days to mature.

The name *Luffa* was borrowed by European botanists in the 18th century from the Arabic name لوف *lūf*.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Uses

### Fiber

The fruit section of *L. aegyptiaca* may be allowed to mature and used as a bath or kitchen sponge after being processed to remove everything but the network of xylem or fibers. Marketed as *luffa* or *loofah*, the sponge is used like a body scrub.

In Paraguay, panels are made out of luffa combined with other vegetable matter and recycled plastic. These can be used to create furniture and construct houses.<sup>[3]</sup>

### Food



Beerakaya pulusu curry ingredients

Luffa are best eaten when small (less than 12 cm) and still green.

In Karnataka's Malenadu (Western Ghats) it is known as *tuppadahirekayi*, which literally translates as "buttersquash". It grows naturally in this region and is consumed when it is still tender and green. It is mostly used as a vegetable in curries, but also as a snack, *bhajji*, dipped in chickpea batter and deep fried. Once the fruit dries out, it is used as a natural scrubber and washing sponge.

In Maharashtra, India, *dodka* (ridge gourd luffa) and *ghosavala* (smooth luffa) are common vegetables prepared with either crushed dried peanuts or with beans. In Northern India as well as Pakistan,

*turai* (thoo-raee) is the common name for luffa.

In China, Indonesia, the Philippines (where it is called *patola*) and Manipur, India, (where it is called *sebot*) the luffa or is eaten as a green vegetable in various dishes. It is also known as "Chinese okra" in Canada. In Spanish, it is called an Estropajo<sup>[4]</sup>.

Luffa species are used as food plants by the larvae of some Lepidoptera species, including *Hypercompe albicornis*.

### Medicine

Its juice is used as a natural remedy for jaundice. The juice is obtained by pounding the bitter luffa and squeezing it through a cloth. Bitter luffa seeds and dry crusts are also available and can be used for the same purpose.

## Gallery



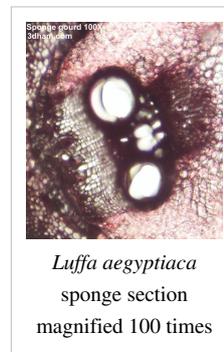
A bag of natural luffas on an organic farm.



*Luffa acutangula* seeds. Each division of the ruler is 1 mm. Seeds of *Luffa aegyptica* look very similar.



A luffa sponge whose coarse texture helps with skin polishing.



*Luffa aegyptiaca* sponge section magnified 100 times



Habitat of the  
vine



*Luffa aegyptiaca* - MHNT



*Luffa operculata* - MHNT

## References

- [1] The plant genus name "Luffa" was introduced to Western botany nomenclature by the botanist Tournefort in 1706. In establishing the *Luffa* genus, Tournefort identified just one member species and called it "Luffa Arabum". His 1706 article includes detailed drawings of this species (which is now called *Luffa aegyptiaca*) – Ref (<http://www.archive.org/stream/histoiredelacad06laca#page/n260/mode/1up>). The species is native to tropical Asia but has been under cultivation in Egypt since late medieval times. The botanist Forskal visited Egypt in the early 1760s and noted that it was called لوف *lūf* in Arabic – Ref (<http://archive.org/stream/mobot31753002702097#page/LXXV/mode/1up>). In the 18th century the botanist Linnaeus adopted the name *luffa* for *L. aegyptiaca* and assigned this *luffa* to the *Momordica* genus, and did not use a separate *Luffa* genus. More refs on *Luffa* in 18th century botany nomenclature: "A commentary on Loureiro's "Flora Cochinchinensis" " (<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=iVsLAAAAIAAJ&lpq=PA377&dq=Tournefort+luffa&pg=PA377#v=onepage&q=Tournefort+luffa&f=false>), by E.D. Merrill, year 1935, in *Transactions of American Philosophical Society* volume 24 part 2, page 377-378. *Luffa* @ ATILF ([http://portail.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/getobject\\_?p.69:116./var/artfla/encyclopedie/textdata/IMAGE/](http://portail.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/getobject_?p.69:116./var/artfla/encyclopedie/textdata/IMAGE/)) and "Suite de l'Etablissement de Quelques Nouveaux Genres de Plantes" (<http://www.archive.org/stream/histoiredelacad06laca#page/83/mode/1up>), by J.P. de Tournefort (1706) in *Mémoires de l'Academe Royale des Sciences* année 1706. The earliest known record of name "Luffa" in English is in 1768 from the botanist Philip Miller, who ascribes the genus name to Tournefort, and uses Tournefort's species name "Luffa Arabum", and says "Egyptian cucumber" is a name used in English - Ref (<http://archive.org/stream/mobot31753002894894#page/LUD-LUN/mode/1up>).
- [2] *Luffa* @ Floridata.com ([http://www.floridata.com/ref/l/luff\\_aeg.cfm](http://www.floridata.com/ref/l/luff_aeg.cfm)).
- [3] Recyclable homes, Rolex Awards 2008 ([http://www.rolexawards.com/profiles/laureates/elsa\\_zaldvar/project](http://www.rolexawards.com/profiles/laureates/elsa_zaldvar/project))
- [4] <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/estropajo>

## External links

- Multilingual taxonomic information at the University of Melbourne (<http://www.plantnames.unimelb.edu.au/Sorting/Luffa.html>)
- *Luffa aegyptiaca* at Floridata ([http://www.floridata.com/ref/l/luff\\_aeg.cfm](http://www.floridata.com/ref/l/luff_aeg.cfm))
- Luffa Information (<http://luffa.info>)

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