Physalis alkekengi - L.

Common Name	Winter Cherry
Family	Solanaceae
Synonyms	P. francheti. P. latifolia.
Known Hazards	All parts of the plant, except the ripe fruit, are poisonous[19, 65, 238].
Habitats	Cultivated ground and vineyards[147]. Hedgerows and by damp paths, from the plains to the lower slopes of mountains[7].
Range	Asia - Caucasus to China. Occasionally naturalized in Britain.
Edibility Rating	
Medicinal Rating	
Care	

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Illustration_Physalis_alkekengi0_clean.jpg

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:Llez

Summary

Physical Characteristics

Physalis alkekengi is a PERENNIAL growing to 0.3 m (1ft) by 0.6 m (2ft in). It is hardy to zone 6 and is not frost tender. It is in flower in July. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs) and are pollinated by Bees.

Suitable for: light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils and prefers well-drained soil. Suitable pH: acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils. It can grow in semi-shade (light woodland) or no shade. It prefers moist soil.

Habitats

Cultivated Beds;

Edible Uses

Edible Parts: Fruit; Leaves.
Edible Uses:

Fruit - raw or cooked[1, 2, 105]. Rich in vitamins[100], with twice the vitamin C of lemons[179], but not much taste[178]. Another report says that they are juicy but with a bitter acrid flavour[4], whilst another says that they add a delicious flavour to salads[7]. We have found them to be bitter and rather unpleasant[K]. The fruit is a berry about 17mm in diameter[200]. The plant conveniently wraps up each fruit in its own 'paper bag' (botanically, the calyx) to protect it from pests and the elements. This calyx is toxic and should not be eaten[34, 65]. Young leaves - cooked[105, 170, 179]. Caution is advised, the leaves are almost certainly poisonous, at least when raw.

Medicinal Uses

Plants For A Future can not take any responsibility for any adverse effects from the use of plants. Always seek advice from a professional before using a plant medicinally.

Antiphlogistic; Antitussive; Aperient; Diuretic; Expectorant; Febrifuge; Homeopathy; Lithontripic.

The plant has a long history of herbal use, and an interesting chemistry, but it is seldom used in modern practice[238]. The whole plant is antiphlogistic, antipyretic, antitussive and expectorant[9, 61, 147, 178, 218]. It has been used in the treatment of urinary and skin diseases[240]. Some caution is recommended since an overdose of the plant is said to easily precipitate an abortion[218]. The fruit is aperient, strongly diuretic and lithontripic[4, 7, 9, 218]. It is used internally in the treatment of gravel, suppression of urine etc and is highly recommended in fevers and in gout[4, 238]. The fruit is harvested when fully ripe and can be used fresh, juiced or dried[238]. The calyx should be removed[238]. The leaves and stems are febrifuge and slightly tonic[4]. They are used in the treatment of the malaise that follows malaria, and for weak or anaemic people[4]. The fresh leaves have been used externally to make soothing poultices in the treatment of skin inflammations[238, 244]. The seed is used to promote early labour[218]. A homeopathic remedy is made from the fruit. It is used in the treatment of kidney and bladder disorders[9].

Other Uses

None known

Cultivation details

Succeeds in any well-drained soil in full sun or light shade[111, 200]. The fully dormant plant is hardy in most of Britain, though the young growth in spring can be damaged by late frosts. A very ornamental plant[1] though it can be invasive[200]. The sub-species P. alkekengi francheti. Mak. (sometimes treated as a separate species) is a more vigorous form of the species with larger fruits[200]. Slugs are very fond of the new growth in spring and can destroy even quite large clumps[K].

Propagation

Seed - sow March/April in a greenhouse only just covering the seed. Germination usually takes place quickly and freely. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots of fairly rich soil when they are large enough to handle and plant them out in early summer. Diurnal temperature fluctuations assist germination[170]. Division in spring[111]. Very easy, larger divisions can be planted out direct into their permanent positions. We have found that it is better to pot up the smaller divisions and grow them on in light shade in a cold frame until they are well established before planting them out in late spring or early summer. Basal cuttings in early summer[111]. Harvest the shoots with plenty of underground stem when they are about 8 - 10cm above the ground. Pot them up into individual pots and keep them in light shade in a cold frame or greenhouse until they are rooting well. Plant them out in the summer.

Plant Suppliers: Click here for a List

You can download this page as a PDF

Expert comment

Author

L.

Botanical References

200

Links / References

[K] **Ken Fern** Notes from observations, tasting etc at Plants For A Future and on field trips.

[1]**F. Chittendon.** RHS Dictionary of Plants plus Supplement. 1956
Comprehensive listing of species and how to grow them. Somewhat outdated, it has been replaces in 1992 by a new dictionary (see [200]).

[2]**Hedrick. U. P.** Sturtevant's Edible Plants of the World.
Lots of entries, quite a lot of information in most entries and references.

[4]**Grieve.** A Modern Herbal.
Not so modern (1930's?) but lots of information, mainly temperate plants.

[7]**Chiej. R.** Encyclopaedia of Medicinal Plants.
Covers plants growing in Europe. Also gives other interesting information on the plants. Good photographs.

[9]**Launert. E.** Edible and Medicinal Plants.
Covers plants in Europe. a drawing of each plant, quite a bit of interesting information.

[34]**Harrison. S. Wallis. M. Masefield. G.** The Oxford Book of Food Plants.
Good drawings of some of the more common food plants from around the world. Not much information though.

[61]**Usher. G.** A Dictionary of Plants Used by Man.
Forget the sexist title, this is one of the best books on the subject. Lists a very extensive range of useful plants from around the world with very brief details of the uses. Not for the casual reader.

[65]**Frohne. D. and Pfänder. J.** A Colour Atlas of Poisonous Plants.
Brilliant. Goes into technical details but in a very readable way. The best work on the subject that I've come across so far.

[100]**Polunin. O.** Flowers of Europe - A Field Guide.
An excellent and well illustrated pocket guide for those with very large pockets. Also gives some details on plant uses.

[105]**Tanaka. T.** Tanaka's Cyclopaedia of Edible Plants of the World.

The most comprehensive guide to edible plants I've come across. Only the briefest entry for each species, though, and some of the entries are more than a little dubious. Not for the casual reader.

[111]**Sanders. T. W.** Popular Hardy Perennials.

A fairly wide range of perennial plants that can be grown in Britain and how to grow them.

[147]**?** A Barefoot Doctors Manual.

A very readable herbal from China, combining some modern methods with traditional chinese methods.

[170]**Dremann. C. G.** Ground Cherries, Husk Tomatoes and Tomatilloes.

Only a small booklet but it covers the various species in some depth.

[178]**Stuart. Rev. G. A.** Chinese Materia Medica.

A translation of an ancient Chinese herbal. Fascinating.

[179]**Reid. B. E.** Famine Foods of the Chiu-Huang Pen-ts'ao.

A translation of an ancient Chinese book on edible wild foods. Fascinating.

[200]**Huxley. A.** The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening. 1992.

Excellent and very comprehensive, though it contains a number of silly mistakes. Readable yet also very detailed.

[218]**Duke. J. A. and Ayensu. E. S.** Medicinal Plants of China

Details of over 1,200 medicinal plants of China and brief details of their uses. Often includes an analysis, or at least a list of constituents. Heavy going if you are not into the subject.

[238]**Bown. D.** Encyclopaedia of Herbs and their Uses.

A very well presented and informative book on herbs from around the globe. Plenty in it for both the casual reader and the serious student. Just one main quibble is the silly way of having two separate entries for each plant.

[240]**Chopra. R. N., Nayar. S. L. and Chopra. I. C.** Glossary of Indian Medicinal Plants (Including the Supplement).

Very terse details of medicinal uses of plants with a wide range of references and details of research into the plants chemistry. Not for the casual reader.

[244]**Phillips. R. & Foy. N.** Herbs

Deals with all types of herbs including medicinal, culinary, scented and dye plants. Excellent photographs with quite good information on each plant.

Readers comment

Elizabeth H.
Claire Sat Jul 8 2006

I need to know how to keep dark yellow segmented worms off of these plants.

Elizabeth H.
Mon Oct 1 2007

I have grown these for a number of years. When properly developed and ripened; the fruit is sweet, pleasant and, similar in taste and appearance to P.peruviana; but smaller, more vivid orange in colour and, perhaps a little less juicy. If not properly developed/ripened (due for example to climatic conditions, e.g. UK weather) the fruit is bitter, inedible and possibly poisonous.

QR Code

What's this?

This is a QR code (short for Quick Response) which gives fast-track access to our website pages. QR Codes are barcodes that can be read by mobile phone (smartphone) cameras. This QR Code is unique to this page. All plant pages have their own unique code. For more information about QR Codes click here.

1. Copy and print the QR code to a plant label, poster, book, website, magazines, newspaper etc and even t-shirts.
2. Smartphone users scan the QR Code which automatically takes them to the webpage the QR Code came from.
3. Smartphone users quickly have information on a plant directly for the pfaf.org website on their phone.

Rate This Plant

Please rate this plants for how successful you have found it to be. You will need to be logged in to do this. Our intention is not to create a list of 'popular' plants but rather to highlight plants that may be rare and unusual and that have been found to be useful by website users. This hopefully will encourage more people to use plants that they possibly would not have considered before.

Add a comment/link

If you have important information about this plant that may help other users please add a comment or link below. Only comments or links that are felt to be directly relevant to a plant will be included. If you think a comment/link or information contained on this page is inaccurate or misleading we would welcome your feedback at admin@pfaf.org. If you have questions about a plant please use the Forum on this website as we do not have the resources to answer questions ourselves.

* Please note: the comments by website users are not necessarily those held by PFAF and may give misleading or inaccurate information.

Subject : Physalis alkekengi

Links	To add a link to another website with useful info add the details here

Name of Site	
URL of Site	http://
Details	

Submit

Discussion Monitor

To have posts to this page mailed to you enter your email address here:
(Your email address will not appear on the webpage or be passed on to third parties).

Your Address : Monitor