

Tomato, Husk—*Physalis pruinosa* L.¹

James M. Stephens²

The husk tomato, which is also called ground cherry, strawberry tomato, Chinese lanterns, tomatillo, bladder cherry, aklekengi, and Cape gooseberry, is a member of the Solanaceae family. It is similar to but smaller than the tomatillo, *P. ixocarpa* Brot. ex Hornem.

Description

Both upright and trailing varieties are available. One variety is an exotic, super-hardy, 2-foot-high perennial with tomato-shaped leaves. Its small white flowers, which form in the spring, are followed by large dense clusters of 1- to 2-inch brilliant, orange-scarlet, lantern-shaped fruits in the fall. Each fruit is smooth-skinned and completely enclosed in a thin papery husk, which is loose and easily removed. Each tomato-like fruit contains many small, inconspicuous seeds.

Culture

Husk tomatoes are seldom grown in Florida, but do well in home gardens. Plants are annuals in the north, but some forms are perennial farther south. Seeds are often advertised in mail order catalogs. Plant seeds about the time of year that you would normally grow tomatoes. Soil preparation and plant culture is also similar to that for tomatoes. Most varieties are sensitive to frost damage, and insects appear to be the most severe pest problem. The tomato fruit worm, tunneling into the fruit through a hole in the husk, has been observed in the fall in Gainesville, FL.



Figure 1. Husk tomato.
Credits: James M. Stephens, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Tomatillo.
Credits: Blue Goose, Inc.

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Use

The whole fruit with the husk removed is used in preserves. Pies may be made from fruits that have dropped and matured on the ground.