

Roselle — *Hibiscus sabdariffa* L.¹

James M. Stephens²

Roselle is a common garden plant in the tropics and grows readily in Florida. Other names are red sorrel, Indian sorrel, and Florida cranberry. In the south it serves as somewhat of a substitute for cranberries. ‘Victor’ is a good variety grown in South Florida.



Figure 1.

DESCRIPTION

The okra-like plant is an annual, 5-7 feet in height, with lobed leaves sometimes used for greens. The narrow leaves and stems are reddish-green in color. The main edible part is the fleshy sepal, called a calyx, surrounding the seed boll in the flower. The calyx is bright red and acid, and can be used in preserves, jelly, juice, or a cranberry-like sauce. The

size of the calyx varies with each variety, but ranges from ½ to 1½ inches in diameter.

CULTURE

Roselle is usually started from seed but may be grown from cuttings. It is usually started in April or in late August in Florida, requiring about 4 months to mature. Culture is very similar to eggplants and okra.

USE

The “fruits” should be gathered before any woody tissue develops in the calyx. They should be tender, crisp, and plump. As much as 16 pounds of fruit per plant have been gathered in some South Florida plantings. Abundant production has been obtained in Gainesville in November. Because of its old “cracker” heritage, roselle has been planted near the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings home at Cross Creek.

1. This document is HS659, one of a series of the Horticultural Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date May 1994. Revised March 2009. Reviewed February 2012. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. James M. Stephens, professor, Horticultural Sciences Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.