

Momordica—*Momordica* spp.¹

James M. Stephens²

Three members of the genus *Momordica* are sometimes encountered in Florida gardens where they do very well. These are Chinese cucumber (*M. cochinchinensis*), balsam pear (*M. charantia*), and balsam apple (*M. balsamina*). All these cucurbits are fruits of annual running vines with near-round, deeply notched leaves. They are quite popular in oriental countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam, and China.



Figure 1. Chinese cucumber
Credits: James M. Stephens

Description and Use

Chinese cucumber fruit are cucumber-shaped, 6 to 8 inches long, dark to yellowish-green, and very warty (bumpy) on the outside surface. The hollow center contains several watermelon-shaped, irregularly-etched seeds covered with a

scarlet pulp. The fleshy portion of the fruit is the edible part and is mainly cooked in soups.

The balsam pear, which is also called bitter melon, is 4 to 6 inches long, oblong, and pointed with warty furrows extending lengthwise. When fully ripe, it splits into three divisions. The immature fruit is boiled as a vegetable. The related balsam apple has a smaller, 3-inch long, orange-colored, egg-shaped fruit that is used in a similar manner.

Culture

Momordica production in Florida gardens should be similar to production of cucumbers. Allow 3 to 4 months from seeding to harvest. Provide ample space or a trellis for the vines that sometimes reach 10 feet or more in length.

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