

Gai Choy

Brassica juncea

Otherwise known as...

Chinese mustard, Swatow mustard greens, Mustard cabbage

Background

Gai choy is one member of the diverse mustard family. Mustards are thought to have originated around the Central Himalayas, but are now grown in all parts of Asia. The earliest varieties were cultivated were used for spice and oil extracted from the seeds. Around the 7th century varieties were developed, which could be used as fresh leafy vegetables. Their appearance varies - the leaves can be more or less crinkled, the thick ribs and veins more or less prominent, and colour ranges from bright to dark green.

Where and How does it grow?

Gai choy prefers warm, humid conditions. The plants are very vigorous with yields of up to 12kg/m²! The compounds which give them their distinctive flavour help to defend the plants against chewing insects. One problem with gai choy is that it can tend to go to seed early in development, instead of developing into a larger plant suitable for commercial harvest. However, newer varieties resist "bolting" while others can be harvested earlier in development.

Preparation and Cooking

The flavour of gai choy is something many people will either love or hate! Large, mature gai choys can be extremely peppery. Mature gai choy needs to be cooked before eating, otherwise it is a bit indigestible. However, baby gai choy can be eaten fresh and is a delicious way to spice up a salad, giving it a hot, mustardy bite. The thick and fleshy stems are often used separately to the more pungent leaves. They can be preserved by salting or pickling in vinegar, or added to a soup. Gai choy stems and leaves can both be used in stir fries, especially if combined with other strongly flavoured ingredients.

Nutritional Value

Gai choy is extremely nutritious. A cupful (140g) can provide all of the recommended daily requirement of Vitamin C, 60% of the recommended Vitamin A and 20% of the iron. It is also high in beta-carotene, calcium and potassium.

Gai choy contains high concentrations of sinigrin, a glucosinolate which is thought to be particularly active in the body and reduce the risk of certain cancers.

In addition, gai choy is often used in Chinese folk remedies. Soup made of the vegetable is used to reduce inflammation and the effects of colds and flu.



Baby gai choy

