

ECHO Asia Seed Fact Sheet

Scientific name – *Sauropus androgynous*

English common name – Katuk, sweet leaf

Asian common names –

- Chinese - 马尼菜 (*mani cai*)
- Malay - *cekur manis*, *sayur manis*, or *asin-asin*
- Thai - ผักหวาน phak waan
- Vietnamese - rau ngót

General description and special characteristics – Green leafy, perennial vegetable grown as a shrub. Leaves and young stem tips make a good edible green. Flavor is reminiscent of fresh peas or peanuts. Does extremely well in hot humid conditions; tolerates occasional flooding and acidic soils. Occurs in elevations from sea level to 1,300 m (4,264 ft).

Crop uses (culinary) – Tender shoots, flowers, and young and old leaves are all used for food. Katuk leaves also retain their color and firmness when cooked. In northern Thailand, tender shoots are used in soups, cooked and eaten with chili sauce, and stir-fried in various sauces.



Photo: ECHO Asia staff

Crop uses (medicinal) – Leaves are reported to have medicinal value when prepared as a vegetable; recommended for women after childbirth to stimulate milk production and for recovery of the reproductive organs.

Seasons of production – A perennial, katuk can be grown year-round; in northern Thailand, katuk shoots grow best in the hot-rainy season (May-September).

Length of production and harvest period – A crop can be harvested just 4 months after cuttings are planted. Katuk will produce abundantly throughout the warm months. During the coldest 2-3 months, plants may appear a bit sickly, stop growing, and be less tasty until new growth resumes with warm weather.

Production methods – To propagate, cut a 20-30 cm (7.8-12 in) long section from a moderately woody stem with 2-3 nodes. Remove all stems and leaves from the cutting, and make sure that the bottom end of the cutting is within 3 cm (1.2 in) of a node. Place stems in an appropriate propagation bed with sun protection as well as adequate moisture and drainage; transplant into nursery bags when rooted. Afterward, plant into the garden during the early rainy season. Katuk prefers full sun or partial shade and is often planted in mass or mixed plantings with other crops and/or along fence lines and boundaries. Katuk becomes spindly if left un-pruned; it is best to cut stems back to 1-2 m (roughly 3-6 ft) or as part of routine harvesting.

Plant spacing – Establish at least 60-91 cm (2-3 ft) apart.

Pollination – Open pollinated; cross-pollination is most likely necessary for seed production.

Environmental conditions for production – Grows best in hot, humid conditions.

Soil requirements – Grows best in soil with high organic matter; prefers mulch and good drainage.

Pests and diseases – Katuk has minimal pest and disease problems. Minor pests include the Chinese rose beetle (*Adoretus sinicus*) and slugs. In northern Thailand, there are reports of root rot under excessively moist conditions and suspected nematode problems.

Seed saving – Katuk fruits are pink/yellowish-white round capsules that typically contain 4-6 seeds. Seeds should be removed just as seed capsules begin to crack open. The seeds are black when mature and viable for only 3-4 months when kept dry and cool. Even while seeds are still viable, germination will be around 50% at best. Germination will be higher if seed coats are pulled off just prior to planting. Propagating by cuttings is often preferred to planting seeds. Using an established plant, propagation by cuttings is very easy and highly successful.

References –

Ashworth, S. 1991. Seed to Seed. Decorah, Iowa: Seed Savers Exchange, Inc.

Meitzner, L. S. & M. L. Price. 1996. Amaranth to Zai Holes: Ideas for Growing Food Under Difficult Conditions. North Fort Myers, Florida: ECHO,

Ram, J. 1994. Sweetleaf Bush. Tropical Vegetable Leaflet No. 10. Pacific Islands Farm Manual.

Toensmeier, E. 2007. Perennial Vegetables. White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company.

Wikipedia. 2012. *Sauropus androgynous*. Available: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sauropusandrogynus>.