

ECHO Asia Seed Fact Sheet

Scientific name – *Hibiscus acetosella*

English common name – Cranberry hibiscus, false roselle, red leaved hibiscus, African rosemallow

Asian common names – As a relatively new crop, no common names have been found

Variety –

- ‘ECHO’

General description and special characteristics – A striking and colorful African perennial with red to maroon leaves resembling a maple leaf in shape. Tends to grow straight and tall without pruning, but can be formed into a bush or shrub. The leaves are pleasantly tart to eat.

Crop uses (culinary) – Leaves have a flavor reminiscent of cranberries, hence the name. They can be cooked or eaten raw in salads, providing flavor and color. Cooked, they can become slimy, so they are used in small amounts and cooked for a short time. Young shoots can be cooked and eaten, though fibrous. The flowers can be used to make a drink with lemon or lime juice, though usually to add color rather than flavor. Often confused with its close relative roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*), the calyxes (sepals) of cranberry hibiscus are not eaten.

Crops uses (livestock production) – Cranberry hibiscus can be eaten by animals, though no nutritive information is known (probably similar to that of relatives *H. sabdariffa* L. and *H. cannabinus* L.).

Other uses – Stems can be used for quality fiber, though quantity is quite low. It is used in Central Africa as a hedge. In Angola, an infusion of the leaves in water is used as a post-fever tonic or to treat anemia. In East Africa, children with an aching body are washed in cold water with mashed cranberry hibiscus leaves added.

Seasons of production – Young leaves can be harvested as soon as the plant is established. Pruning tips will cause branching for more leaf production. In warm climates the plant will grow year round.

Pollination – Cranberry hibiscus is mainly self pollinating, although bees and other insects are commonly seen around the flowers.

Plant spacing – For commercial production, spacing can be around 15-30 cm (6-12 in), since young plants will be harvested. For home or garden production, plants are spaced at much larger intervals to accommodate its large branching habit.

Production methods – For commercial production, plants are first thinned to 15 cm (6 in) spacing when they reach 25 cm (10 in) tall. The next harvest is by removing tips and allowing side shoots to form. This process can be repeated multiple times. When grown for production, weeding is rarely necessary, because the plant quickly covers the ground, suppressing most weeds. In home or garden use, cranberry hibiscus is formed into a shrub by pruning and young leaves are harvested as needed. After a year of production, or just before flowering, the whole plant can be cut back above the base to allow new growth.

Known environmental conditions for production – Cranberry hibiscus occurs in abandoned fields and plantations, on waste ground, in marshes and in forest clearings. It is cultivated at low to medium altitudes, usually in high rainfall areas, and requires good drainage. It can be fully exposed to the sun, but prefers some shade. It's highly susceptible to frost.



Known soil requirements – Cranberry hibiscus requires deep, loose, well-drained soils. It is fairly drought tolerant, but prefers slightly acidic soils (pH 6.1 to 6.5).

Known pests – High resistance to root-knot nematodes makes it an excellent crop to follow solanaceous (nightshades, tomatoes, peppers, eggplants) or other plants affected by nematodes. Plant losses have been attributed to soil pathogens such as *Rhizoctonia solani* and *Sclerotium rolfsii*.

Seed saving – Cranberry hibiscus flowers with shortening days. To collect seed, allow seed pods to dry on the plant, then harvest. Pods are easily cracked open and seeds can be shaken out. Gloves may be required, as stems and pods have small hairs that can irritate some people. Vegetable types are almost always propagated by seeds, while ornamental types are propagated by cuttings.

References

“Cranberry Hibiscus.” Plant Information Sheets. ECHO, North Fort Myers, FL.

Grubben, G. J. H. *Vegetables*. Wageningen, Netherlands: Backhuys, 2004. Print.