

FGCU Food Forest

Plant Database

Chaya (*Cnidoscolus aconitifolius*)

Origin: Yucatan peninsula of Mexico

Description: Chaya is a bushy woody multi-tree 6-20 feet tall. It has smooth greenish grey bark with toothed palmate leaves.

have skin irritating hairs.

Uses: Edible cooked leaves and young tips

Harvest: Year Round

Flower: Clusters of tiny white flowers borne at the tip of branches during warm months.

Tolerance: Generally pest and disease resistant. Chaya is drought tolerant, it grows in full sun to part shade. Possesses a bushier appearance and grows fast in full sun but will be leggy and grow at a moderate rate in part shade. It can be grown in a wide variety of soils but will do best in soils with organic matter. It can tolerate moderate to heavy



General Description: Overall, Chaya is an easy to grow tender perennial plant that provides nutritious greens throughout the year. Chaya is easily propagated from woody cuttings, plants can live up to twenty years.

- **Native Origin:** Yucatan peninsula of Mexico
- **General History:** Chaya also known as Spinach Tree grows natively in thickets and open forest in the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico. Chaya was first introduced in Cuba then in South Florida, Hawaii, and throughout the subtropics and tropics of the Americas and

the Caribbean. Chaya was initially marketed and utilized as an ornamental shrub outside of its native range, only recently has this plant been recognized and sought after for its nutritional benefits and year round food production. Select cultivars of this plant possess certain traits that make this plant easier to harvest from and eat. For example, certain cultivars lack stinging hairs on the leaves and have larger rounder leaves. All cultivars possess latex like sap in the stems that may irritate the skin of sensitive individuals.

- **Distribution:** Tropical and subtropical humid and arid regions in South, Central, and North America, and the Caribbean.
- **Season of Harvest:** Year-Round (Mainly during growing season or warm to hot months)
- **Culinary Uses:** The leaves of Chaya must be cooked in boiling water in a non-aluminum pot for a minimum of ten minutes before eating. This is done to neutralize trace amounts of toxins. Gloves and long sleeves should be worn when harvesting leaves to avoid excessive contact with sap and potential stinging hairs. The leaves should be boiled before being used in stir fries. Whole Chaya leaves are used whole as wraps for cooking vegetables. The shredded boiled leaves are used in soups, stir fries, and salads. The chopped blanched leaves can be frozen or canned. Chaya is an excellent source of protein and antioxidants. 100 grams of fresh Chaya leaves contain following amounts of the daily recommended values 14.8% protein, 33% calcium, 51% iron, 27% vitamin A, and 342% of vitamin C.

| Chaya | |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| Scientific Classification | |
| Kingdom: | Plantae |
| (unranked): | Angiosperms |
| (unranked): | Eudicots |
| (unranked): | Rosids |
| Order: | Malpighiales |
| Family: | Euphorbiaceae |
| Genus: | Cnidocolus |
| Species: | C. aconitifolius |

Sources

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mv045>

http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/sustainag/extn_pub/veggie%20pubs/Chaya,%20Spinach%20Tree,%20Chay,%20Kikilchay.pdf

<http://www.eattheweeds.com/chaya-the-spinach-tree/>

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