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Bottle Gourd

Lagenaria siceraria

The annual Bottle Gourd is one of the oldest cultural plants. With climbing sprouts it grows rapidly a few meters during the year and builds out velvet heart-shaped leaves and white coloured bell-flowers. Its gourd fruits come in various shapes and can be 10 to 100 cm long and weigh up to one kilogram - since they become very hard and impervious for fluids, they are widely used as cup, bottle or vase, as well as for musical instruments that are often decorated with artistic paintings.

Natural location: The Bottle Gourd has its origins most likely in Africa, but there are also seed findings in South America and in Thailand, that date back around 6000 to 12000 BC.

Cultivation: You can start the seed propagation indoors around March on your windowsill. Keep the seeds initially for 12 hours in warm water for priming. Then, plant the seeds separately with the tip first into small pots filled with moist potting compost, and let the other end of the seed just stick out of the earth a little. Cover the seed container with clear film to prevent the earth from drying out. Don't forget to make some holes in the clear film and take it every second or third day completely off for about 2 hours. That way you avoid mold formation on your potting compost. Place the seed container somewhere bright and warm with a temperature between 18°C and 22°C and keep the earth moist, but not wet. It only takes one or two weeks for the first seedlings to come up, and after another three to four weeks, they can be shifted to bigger pots. Outdoors, the best time for seed propagation is in May, when the earth is already more warm and dry. However, with early indoor propagation chances are that the plant will produce its fruits more early.

Place: The Bottle Gourd prefers a bright and full sunny place.

Care: The Bottle Gourd needs plenty of water and prefers a humous soil for cultivation. If the earth is not nutritious enough, it is advisable to provide the plant additionally with fluid fertilizer. The bigger the fruits are, the more important it will be to create a dry and air-permeable underlayment to prevent the gourds from molding. Only when the fruits are hard and ripe around October or November, they are good for harvesting. The gourds should be kept apart from each other in a dry and cool place to mature. Young and unripe fruits can be prepared in the same way as zucchini, but they have a poor nutrient level. It is more common to use the hard, but very light matured fruits to make various containers or musical instruments.

During the winter: Even though some species can endure cooler temperatures than others, none of the gourd plants can tolerate a longer frost period – and they don't have to since the gourd is annual. The kernels of your fruits can be used for the cultivation of new plants next year.