

Seminole Pumpkin | Ark of Taste Nomination Form

PRODUCT NAME

Seminole Pumpkin
chassa howitska (Cucurbita moschata)

CATEGORY

Fresh and dried fruit

COUNTRY

United States of America

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

The Seminole Pumpkin is a pear-shaped or spherical pumpkin with an incredibly hard shell or rind. The rind is so hard that it must be broken with an ax. The rind is a deep gold to light salmon and pinkish buff color. Inside, the flesh is thick and beige, with a fine-grained texture that is sometimes described as powdery.

The Seminole pumpkin possess qualities that make it superior to any other squash or pumpkin that gardeners have attempted to cultivate in southern Florida. The ecological adaptations of this variety allow it to tolerate heat, drought, insects, and powdery mildew on its own. For instance, its silver haired leaves, under the intense sun of the tropics, create an almost shiny reflectance that deters the activity of insect pests. Amy Goldman describes the vines as "irrepressible" after witnessing them survive an assault by squash bugs and winds from rainstorms that devastated other squash varieties.

This pumpkin is well-adapted to the Southern climate and is tolerant to both dry and rainy extremes.

PRODUCT TASTE

The Seminole Pumpkin has a highly esteemed flavor, not only among the Seminole and Miccosukee people, but also among Caucasian Floridians. Amy Goldman claims that when this pumpkin is simply halved and baked, the flavor is so phenomenal that it offers "the treat of a lifetime".

Of the many traditional recipes developed for its use, Seminole pumpkin "bread" is so highly regarded that it is still featured during tribal ceremonies and at a tribal-owned restaurant. The Seminole Pumpkin bread is much more like a fritter or empanada than bread, and has been adopted by the wider Florida community, including other tribes of the Southeast. Unfortunately, due to the precipitous decline in cultivation of this heirloom variety, many people now substitute canned pumpkin, meaning they are unable to achieve the same flavor results.

The pumpkin is also used for baking pies. It keeps well in cold storage.

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PRODUCT HISTORY

The Miccosukee name for this product is "chassa howitska" meaning "hanging pumpkin". The reference is to the method by which the pumpkin grows, as the Seminole and the Miccosukee people would plant the pumpkin seeds at the base of girdled trees, so that the pumpkin vines would grow up the trunk these girdled trees, and the pumpkin fruit would grow to be hanging from the bare limbs. Immigrants to Florida also adopted this cultivation method, producing hundreds of pumpkins per acre. It was under cultivation by Seminole Indians when Spaniards arrived in Florida in the 1500s.

The Seminole Pumpkin is an important product for the Miccosukee, or Creek people and the Seminole people.

HISTORICAL PRODUCTION AREA

Florida Everglades (South West, Florida)

POTENTIAL FOR SUSTAINABLE HARVEST OR PRODUCTION SHOULD THE SPECIES REACH A STABLE POPULATION

The traditional cultivation method of the Seminole Pumpkin's (below a nurse tree) is one of the best examples of indigenous permaculture currently surviving in North America. Should this cultivation method be put into practice again and in greater use, this product is an ideal candidate for sustainable production. Furthermore, the Seminole pumpkin has all the qualities; for example, drought, insect, and mildew resistance, and heat tolerant, required for a revival in its homeland in the Everglades, should Native Americans and non Native Americans alike commit themselves to bringing it back from the brink of extinction.

IS THE PRODUCT FOR SALE ON THE MARKET?

Producer: Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds

Website: www.rareseeds.com

Producer: Fedco Seeds

Website: www.fedcoseeds.com

Producer: Southern Exposure Seed Exchange

Website: www.southernexposure.com

NAME OF PERSON SUPPLYING THE APPLICATION

Co-sponsored:

Steph Hughes (original), Seed Savers Exchange

Megan Larmer (2013), Slow Food USA

Alexandra Emanuelli (2013), Slow Food USA