



## Cultural Requirements for Poha (Cape Gooseberry)

Originally a native of Brazil, the plant known in Hawai'i as Poha became a naturalized native to the high altitude areas of Peru, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador where it was identified. The Poha (*Physalis peruviana*) is also known as Cape Gooseberry, Inca Berry, Aztec Berry, Golden Berry and several other names. It was being cultivated in England as early as 1774 and grown at the Cape of Good Hope by the early settlers before 1807. Some sources attribute the name "Cape Gooseberry" to this fact.

The Poha is a growing shrub with heart shaped velvety leaves. The flowers are yellow and bell shaped. On the plant there is an inflated, papery calyx that becomes a protective cover around the fruit as it grows. It eventually becomes tan in color when the fruit matures. The fruit is round ½-1 inch in diameter, yellow to orange in color with a smooth skin. The fruit contains many seeds, is very juicy, tangy and high in Vitamin C.



The Poha is a close relative of the tomatillo and a distant relative of a number of other edible plants such as potato, eggplant, and members of the nightshade family. It has been introduced and commercially cultivated in various tropical, subtropical and temperate areas around the world. It can be eaten fresh; made into jams, jellies, or canned; dipped into chocolate; used in sauces or even as a flavoring for ice cream.

**Culture:** The Poha is usually found growing above the 1000 foot elevation on mountain slopes and has even been found growing as high as 8000 feet. It has a shallow root system and likes well drained soils, such as a sandy soil or gravelly loam, with a pH of 5.0 to 6.5. Putting some mulch and soil amendments around your plants will help it to retain water and nutrients which should help with the growth of the plant root system. Just remember that fertile soils will produce more plant growth than fruit production.

**Watering:** The Poha plant requires consistent watering. Watering should be as often as possible to keep the soil moist but not damp. Be sure that the pot and planting soil/media you have your plant in has good drainage as the Poha does NOT like "soggy conditions".

**Fertilizing:** As the Poha plant thrives on neglect a higher flowering/fruit production can be attained with very little or no fertilizer. Giving the plant even a moderate amount of fertilizer will encourage more plant growth and less flowering. If any fertilizer is given to your plant, use one with very little or no "nitrogen" – the first of the 3 numbers in the formulation listed on the fertilizer container.

**Harvest:** Harvesting of the fruit usually happens about 60 to 100 days after flowering when the husk has turned straw color. The fruits can be picked off of the plant or from the ground after they fall. Once harvested, the fruits should be spread out to dry at least overnight to reduce moisture and minimize the growth of mildew. It is best to harvest the fruit later in the day to avoid wet husks as they can last in the dry husks for a few months when stored properly. The husked berries can last from 7 to 10 days if stored in a cool dry area.

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References: Hawaii Cooperative Extension Service CTAHR Fact Sheet Poha 1997  
California Rare Fruit Growers, Inc. 1997