

Jicama

Grow

Let It Grow

Jicama is a root vegetable that grows underground. The jicama plant is a vine that grows to be about 20 feet long above ground. Jicama grows best in sunny, temperate climates with well-drained loamy soil.¹

Around the World

Jicama goes by many names around the world: *kuzuimo* in Japan and *dolique tubereaux* or *pais patate* in France to *sankalu* in India. It can also be referred to as *yacón*, *yacuma*, *arboloco*, *leafcup*, *Chinese potato*, or *Mexican yam* or *yam bean*. Jicama is believed to have originated in the Andes Mountains. However, it has been growing in Mexico and Central America for centuries. In the United States, Jicama is grown in Hawaii, California, Arizona, Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico.¹⁻⁴

Meet the Family

Jicama's scientific name is *Pachyrrhizus erosus*, meaning thick root in Greek. It is a legume and a tap root, a relative of the pea or *Fabaceae* family, which includes beans, peanuts and licorice.¹⁻⁴

Fun Fact: Jicama was cultivated in the West Indies. In the 1600's Spaniards took it to Malaysia and the Philippines.¹

Choose

Two main varieties exist: jicama de agua (water) and jicama de leche (milk). Their names indicate their internal juice. The water variety has a large, round root, similar in shape to a turnip. The milk variety has an elongated, knobby root. Most jicama cultivated for United States' consumption is the water variety. The root, jicama, is the only part of the plant we can eat. In the U.S., jicama is harvested mostly in the fall. In Central and South America, jicama is available all year. Jicamas can grow as large as 50 lbs. but should be harvested when under 5 lbs. Choose firm jicamas that are thin-skinned and free of cracks, bruises or mold.¹⁻⁴



Store

The ideal storage conditions for jicama are 60-65 degrees Fahrenheit and 85-95% relative humidity. Under these conditions, fresh jicama should keep for up to four months. However, if jicama is inappropriately handled during distribution, it may only last for one to two weeks. Do not store jicama below 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Keep the jicama dry to avoid molding. Otherwise, decay, discoloration or loss of texture may occur. Once cut, wrap tightly with plastic wrap and keep refrigerated.⁵

Fun Fact: Jicama is often served fresh cut seasoned with chili powder and a squeeze of lime.

Use

Jicama is similar to a potato with its brown skin and white interior. It is different because it is sweeter, can be eaten fresh or cooked, and does not brown when cut. Jicama must be peeled before eating. The texture and flavor are a cross between an apple and a water chestnut. It can be eaten alone or added to a salad, salsa, stir fry, and more. Jicama can be boiled, baked, mashed or made into fries. It can also be canned, resulting in pickles, relish and slaw products. Wash jicama under running water before preparing.¹⁻⁴

Jicama

Teach

Stories behind its success

In Mexico and Central America, jicama increased in popularity after a widespread drought in the early '80's affected potato production. Despite the dry weather, jicama was grown with good results. Therefore, as one of the few surviving products, jicama made its mark. Jicama was also used onboard ships because it stored well, could be eaten raw, and was also thirst quenching!²

Fun Fact: The sweetness of jicama comes from plant fructo-oligosaccharides, which do not metabolize in the human body.⁶⁻⁷

Class Activity - Jicama Sticks

Materials Needed:

- Oven
- Foil, baking sheet, cooling rack
- Peeler, knife and cutting board
- Jicama
- Microwave-safe bowl and large bowl
- Water
- Microwave
- Olive oil and kosher salt (use sparingly)
- Garlic powder, paprika, and black pepper (to taste)

Steps: *Use food safety steps. Wash hands and produce.

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Line cooking sheet with foil. Fit it with the cooling rack.
3. Peel and cut jicama into ¼ inch thick slices.
4. Place jicama sticks in the bowl. Add 2 Tbsp of water per lb. of jicama. Cover and microwave for 15 minutes. Stop once to stir.
5. In a large bowl, toss the jicama fries with the olive oil and spices. Arrange on the cooling rack.
6. Bake for 45 minutes or until browned. Cool slightly and then serve. Enjoy!

Fun Fact: Root vegetables are divided into six subgroups: tap roots, tuberous roots, corms, rhizomes, tubers and bulbs.¹

Eat

Just enjoy jicama!

One cup of jicama has about 50 calories. It is cholesterol free and very low in fat and sodium. Jicama is an excellent source of vitamin C and fiber.⁸

Fun Fact: Jicama is pronounced hik-ka-ma or hee-ka-ma.⁶

Vitamin C helps our body absorb iron and folate from plants, protects us from infections and bruising, aids in healing, keeps our gums healthy, helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones and tissues together, and acts as an antioxidant to prevent cell damage. Soluble fiber helps lower blood cholesterol. Insoluble fiber aids in digestion.⁷

Fun Fact: Jicama is 85-90% water.⁸

Class Activity - Rooting for Vegetables

Materials needed:

- Jicama, carrot, turnip, rutabaga, and potato - peeled and cut into cubes

Steps: *Use food safety steps. Wash hands and produce.

1. Ask the students to record texture, color, smell, and taste for each root vegetable.
2. As a class, compare and contrast all the vegetables observed.

Find

For more jicama info and resources, visit:

1. California Harvest of the Month, <https://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov>
2. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, <https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/programs/fresh-fruit-vegetable>
3. Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/plant/jicama>
4. Blue Book Services: Credit Rating & Marketing Information for the Produce Industry, <https://www.producebluebook.com/know-your-commodity/jicama/>
5. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, www.fns.usda.gov
6. Fruits & Veggies For Better Health, <https://fruitsandveggies.org/>
7. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org
8. USDA FoodData Central, <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/index.html>