

Tomatillos

HORT-PU-243
October 2023

Julia Minter, Jayla Fry, and Dr. Larry Stein

The tomatillo or husk tomato (*Physalis ixocarpa*) looks much like a tomato. The fruit is generally green but can be orange, yellow, red, or even purple. It is enclosed in a papery wrapping called a calyx. The condition of the calyx is commonly used as an indicator of freshness in fresh markets. Native to Mexico and Guatemala, tomatillos are sensitive to cold. The best growing conditions are 80 to 90°F. days with 60 to 70°F. nights, low humidity, and sparse rainfall. Typically they are grown like tomatoes in Texas.

Grow it

Varieties

- 'Cape Gooseberry,' 'Golden Nugget,' 'Mayan Husk Tomato,' 'Mexican Husk,' and others

Soil Preparation

- Spread 2 to 3 inches of compost across the soil surface and mix into the top 4 to 6 inches of soil.

Fertilizing

- Before planting, fertilize with 4 to 5 ounces of 15-5-10 fertilizer for every 10 square feet of garden area. Spread fertilizer throughout the planting area, and mix it into the top 3 to 4 inches of soil.
- Once plants begin to flower, fertilize each plant with a teaspoon of fertilizer. Scratch the fertilizer into the soil around the base of the plant.

Planting

- Tomatillos can be grown from transplants or seeds.
- Plant in the spring after all danger of frost has passed and the soil temperature has warmed.
- Plant transplants every 2 feet in rows 5 feet apart.
- If you are starting with seeds, plant 3 or 4 tomatillo seeds 2 feet apart. When the plants reach 4 to 5 inches tall, thin them to one plant every 2 feet.

Watering

- Water the plants slowly and deeply with 1 to 2 inches of water per week. Tomatillos grow poorly in wet soil conditions, so be careful not to overwater.

Care During the Season

- To keep the fruit off the ground, support the plant by tying it to a stake or placing it inside a cage.

Harvesting

- The plants begin bearing fruit 65 to 85 days after seeding or transplanting and continue for 1 to 2 months, or until the first frost.
- Pick fruits just as the husk (or calyx) bursts.

Insects & Diseases

- Tomatillos have a few insect pests and diseases that could be problematic. These include cutworms, root-knot nematodes, tobacco budworm, whiteflies, black spot, and tobacco mosaic virus.
- If something does not look right with your plant, contact your county Extension agent for more information.



Sun:
Full Sun



Soil:
Well-
drained



Planting:
Warm



Harvest:
Summer



Life Cycle:
Annual



Container:
Friendly



Buy it

- Choose tomatillos that have light-brown, fresh-looking husks that are not shriveled and dried. The fruit should be green, firm, and free from defects.

Use it

Summer Salad

Course: Side Dish Serves: 6

Ingredients:

Dressing

- 1 avocado sliced
- ¼ cup water
- 3 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons chipotle in adobo sauce, minced
- 1 garlic clove, minced

Salad

- 2 cups frozen corn kernels, thawed and drained
- 4 medium Roma tomatoes, seeded and diced
- 1 cup jicama, diced
- 4 medium tomatillos, diced
- 2 medium jalapeños, seeded and diced
- ¼ cup green onion, sliced
- ½ cup cilantro, chopped

Instructions:

Clean your preparation area and wash your hands. Wash your vegetables: tomatoes, jicama, tomatillos, jalapeños, green onions, and cilantro.

Dressing

Combine all ingredients for the dressing in a blender or food processor, and blend until smooth.

Set aside while preparing salad or refrigerate until ready to serve.

Salad

Combine all salad ingredients, and gently toss.

Drizzle with dressing and toss until evenly coated.

Store it

- Store tomatillos, still in their husks, in a paper bag in the refrigerator for about 2 weeks. They may also be frozen whole or sliced. Before freezing, remove the husk, wash, and dry tomatillos.¹
- For canning and preservation instructions, visit nchfp.uga.edu.

Salsa Verde

Course: Side Dish Serves: 16

Ingredients:

- 10 tomatillos
- 1 to 2 serrano peppers
- ½ bunch fresh cilantro
- salt, to taste

Instructions:

Wash and dry tomatillos and serrano peppers. Place on a cookie sheet and broil in the oven on low heat. You can also roast on a griddle or comal (cast iron pan) on medium heat, or try it on your BBQ grill.

Turn tomatillos and peppers consistently so they do not burn, but let them get a rich brown color.

Place tomatillos and peppers in a blender or food processor. Process to a chunky texture. Add fresh cilantro and blend again.

Enjoy your flavorful tangy salsa! Makes 3½ to 4 cups. You can adjust the amount of peppers to your liking—mild, medium, or hot.

Learn about it

Tomatillos are a good source of vitamin C and niacin. They are also a source of fiber, vitamin K, potassium, magnesium, copper, and manganese.²

¹Mackenzie, J. (2018). *Growing tomatillos and ground cherries in home gardens*. University of Minnesota Extension. Retrieved from: <https://extension.umn.edu/vegetables/growing-tomatillos-and-ground-cherries#harvest-and-storage-570315>

²U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2019). *Tomatillos, raw*. FoodData Central. Retrieved from: <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/fdc-app.html#/food-details/168566/nutrients>

