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HUSK CHERRIES (*Physalis pruinosa*)

Similar in appearance to a Chinese Lantern (*Physalis franchetii*), and also known as ground cherries, husk cherries are marble-sized, yellow-orange fruits hidden in a paper-like, straw-colored cover. They have a sweet, mildly acidic taste with a mildly bitter aftertaste. This flavor, in addition to their ability to store well, lends itself to husk cherries being able to be eaten in a variety of different ways: raw, frozen, dried, canned, as preserves, in desserts, and in pies.

A member of the same genus as the tomatillo, husk cherries grow wild in temperate, subtropical, and tropical areas. They were first cultivated in the Cape of Good Hope in the early nineteenth centuries.

CULTURE: Seeds should be sown in fine peat mix, 4–6 seeds per inch. Start in April or 6–7 weeks before transplanting into the garden. Barely cover the seed. Soil temperature should be kept around 75–90°F/24–32°C until germination. Husk cherries are slow to germinate, up to two weeks or more. Keep soil moist until seedlings emerge. Once true leaves develop, transplant seedlings into pots or cell-type containers.

Transplant into a medium-rich garden or field soil after danger of frost has passed, 18–24" apart. Avoid soils with excess nitrogen, as too much nitrogen may produce an abundance of foliage at the expense of fruit production.

PEST AND DISEASES: Husk cherries are susceptible to the same pests and diseases as tomatoes, and so many of the same prevention techniques and treatments apply. Use row covers

to protect young seedlings from flea beetles; *Bacillus thuringiensis* as an effective control for tomato hornworms; and spinosad for potato beetle larvae and adults.

To prevent disease, use young, healthy transplants, avoid overhead irrigation, plow in any plant refuse each fall, rotate crops, and do not handle tobacco or smoke before handling plants. Fungicides can reduce certain diseases when properly selected and applied.

HARVEST: Husk cherries fall from the plant when ripe. The husk should be dry and the fruit yellow-orange in color. Husk cherries are more cold tolerant than tomatoes and will survive a light frost of 30–32°F/-1–0°C.

STORAGE: Fruits can be stored in their husks with good air circulation at 50°F/10°C.