



# SPECIAL GARDEN PROJECT

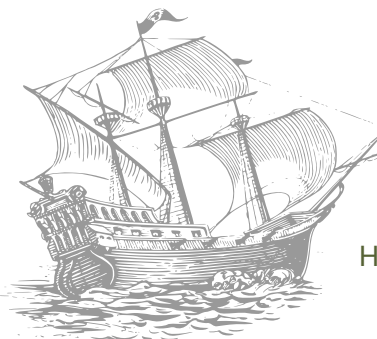


## GOLDIE HUSK CHERRY

### HUSK CHERRY FACTS



- Other common names including cape gooseberry, golden gooseberry, and pineapple tomatillo.
- Husk cherries have been grown for centuries and were eaten by indigenous people of Mexico.
- There are more than 75 different species of husk cherries.



Many plants were found growing here when Columbus discovered North America. We call these native plants.



Husk cherries are an introduced plant. They are native to South and Central America.

### A TOUCH OF HISTORY

# HUSK CHERRY'S FAMILY



PLANTS ARE GROUPED INTO FAMILIES. HUSK CHERRIES ARE IN THE PLANT FAMILY CALLED *SOLANACEAE*. *THIS FAMILY INCLUDES TOMATOES, PEPPERS, AND EGGPLANT.* IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHICH PLANTS ARE RELATED BECAUSE THEY SOMETIMES HAVE THE SAME DISEASE AND INSECT PROBLEMS.

USING CROP ROTATION CAN DECREASE INSECT AND DISEASE PRESSURE. AVOID PLANTING THE SAME FAMILY IN THE GARDEN LOCATION FOR 3 YEARS.

## PLANTING BASICS

Husk cherries are a warm season crop. Seeds can be started inside, then directly in the ground after the last frost date and when soils are warm, usually in mid to late May.

Warm soils allow the seeds and plants to grow rapidly. Cold, wet soils will cause seeds to rot.



### »»» WHERE TO PLANT?

Husk cherries will produce the best when placed in full sun. This is an area that will receive 6–8 hours or more of direct sunlight a day. It will tolerate partial sunlight conditions, but it won't produce as well.

Husk cherries will do best in fertile, well-drained soil. Make sure to leave enough room for the plants to grow. The more crowded the plants are, the taller they get as they reach for sunlight. Husk cherries like to sprawl, so leave at least 18"–24" between plants.

Prepare the soil, spade 6 to 8 inches deep; then work in about a two-inch layer of organic matter. Organic matter is good for all soil types. It helps sandy soils hold water better. In clay soils, it improves drainage so excess water drains away quicker and oxygen is then available to roots. Roots need oxygen to grow and function. Organic matter also adds nutrients to soil as it decomposes.

Compost and manure are examples of organic matter. Do not use fresh manure in spring. It can burn seedlings or cause some plants to grow lots of leaves or stems. Manure is best added in the fall.

# HOW TO PLANT HUSK CHERRY

## >>> STARTING INDOORS

Sow into cell trays 6-7 weeks before the last frost. Can be sown close together 1/4" deep and transplanting into individual pots. Keep the soil moist until seedlings emerge, then only water when seed mix is dry. Plant outdoors once threat of frost has passed.

## >>> DIRECT SEEDING

After the average last frost, plant the seeds in hills, placing about 2 seeds per hill, then 18-24" between hills. Cover lightly with 1/2-1" of soil. Keep the soil moist. The final spacing should be 18-24" between plants.

**The average last spring frost dates in Nebraska are: eastern Nebraska, April 24; central Nebraska, May 1; and May 10 in western Nebraska. Check with your local Nebraska Extension Office for the frost-free date in your area.**

If you don't have room to plant in a traditional garden setting, husk cherry can be grown in containers. Aim for one plant per 12" container. Cattle lick tubs can handle about 1-2 plants. Garden soil is not recommended for containers. A good potting mix will work well for growing plants in containers. Make sure the container has drainage holes in the bottom to allow excess water to run out.

# HUSK CHERRY CARE

## >>> WATERING

Husk cherries can tolerate dry, hot conditions very well. Do not overwater. Plants will need about 1 inch of water a week. Try to keep the soil barely moist. At each watering, moisten the soil about 6-8" deep. Let the soil dry out slightly between waterings. Too much water decreases the soil oxygen, which roots need to grow steadily.

If you use a sprinkler to water the garden, try to water in the morning. This will allow the leaves to dry off throughout the day and decrease the possibility of disease.

## >>> MULCHING

After the seeds begin to emerge, place a 2-3" layer of mulch around husk cherry to conserve moisture, keep soil temperatures cooler, and reduce weeds. This will help roots to grow quickly and steadily. Mulch also helps to keep the fallen husk cherries from hitting the ground and makes it easier to harvest.

Mulch should not touch plant stems or leaves. Use dried brown grass clippings or shredded wood. Do not use green grass clippings as they can "heat up" and damage plants. Adding too much mulch can make soils waterlogged and lack oxygen and can attract insects and slugs.

## >>> WEEDING

Weeds steal water and nutrients from plants, causing them to grow slower. Control weeds when they're small by hoeing, hand-pulling or mulching. Do not hoe too close near plant stems or too deep near the roots, because this may cause damage to the plants.

## >>> FERTILIZING

Husk cherries don't require much fertilizer. Additional fertilizer may not be needed if they were planted in soils that had added organic matter. If you do fertilize, use a well-rounded, water-based fertilizer once the plants are blooming.



## »»» TOMATO HORNWORM

These caterpillars start out small and green, but they have huge appetites. As they feed, they continue to grow. Eaten foliage and caterpillar frass (poop) is usually a sign of infestation. Normally there is about 1-2 caterpillars per plant. Pick off the caterpillars and squish or place into soapy water.



## »»» COLORADO POTATO BEETLE



The Colorado potato beetle larvae (left)

The Colorado potato beetle can be a pest of husk cherry. The larvae looks nothing like the adult beetle (see photos). Both larvae and adults can be hand removed and placed into soapy water or squished. Insecticides can be used, but have an adult make the application according to the label and follow the pre-harvest interval (PHI). The PHI is how long you need to wait from when an application is made to when the produce can be harvested and eaten.

# HARVESTING & STORING

## »»» HARVESTING HUSK CHERRY

Begin harvesting when the papery husks surrounding the fruit turn yellow or tan. Ripe fruit easily falls from the plants, so be prepared to pick up off the ground.

## »»» STORING HUSK CHERRY

Harvested fresh husk cherries can be kept in a cool area within their husks for up to 3 months. Berries can be kept in the refrigerator for 2-3 weeks.



# USING HUSK CHERRIES

## EDIBLE FRUITS

The fruits can be eaten fresh, dried, frozen, jams, preserves, or used in recipes to make baked goods, desserts, sauces, or even fruit pie.

Fruit is often described as sweet and zesty, like a pineapple crossed with a tomato.

# GRILLED CORN, BASIL AND HUSK CHERRY SALAD

**YIELD: 4 SERVINGS**

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1/8 cup olive oil
- juice of one small lime
- zest of the lime
- salt and pepper to taste
- 4 ears grilled corn
- 1 cup husked whole husk cherries
- 1 cup cucumber, quartered lengthwise, deseeded, and chopped
- 3 tablespoons basil, cut into a fine chiffonade
- 2 tablespoons shallot, finely minced
- 1 teaspoon jalapeno pepper, minced finely (add more if you prefer)

## DIRECTIONS:

- Wash hands with soap and water.
- Wash the husk cherries in their husks. Pinch the base of the husk away from the cherry - it should slide off easily.
- Prepare the vinaigrette by combining the olive oil, lime juice, lime zest and salt and pepper. Set aside.
- Place the grilled corn, husk cherries, cucumber, basil, shallot, and jalapeño into a medium-sized serving bowl and mix the ingredients thoroughly.
- Add the vinaigrette, mix all ingredients, and chill in the refrigerator.



Information compiled by Elizabeth Exstrom, Extension Educator Husk Cherry information:  
<https://extension.psu.edu/programs/master-gardener/counties/susquehanna/news/off-the-beaten-path-ground-cherries>  
 Career information: <https://www.seedyourfuture.org/careers>  
 Recipe from <https://food52.com/recipes/23474-grilled-corn-basil-and-ground-cherry-salad>  
 Goldie Husk Cherry photo courtesy of Johnny's Select Seeds, [Johnnyseeds.com](http://Johnnyseeds.com), 1-877-564-6697.



# EXHIBITING GOLDIE HUSK CHERRY

This old-fashioned fruit from the tomato family has sweet berries inside golden husks. The fruits have many uses and can be eaten raw, dried, frozen, canned, or made into tasty treats like pies, desserts, or preserves.

## »»» EXHIBITING TIPS

**State Fair Special Garden Project Educational Exhibit Class G-775-001.** The educational exhibit is based on what was learned from the project. Present information on a poster 14" X 22" or in a clear plastic report cover. The 4-H member's name, age, and county must be on the back of the poster or report cover.

**State Fair Special Garden Project Fresh Cut Flowers or Harvested Vegetables Class G-775-002.** The current years' Special Garden Project fresh cut flowers, harvested vegetable or fruit should be entered in this class.

Husk cherry can exhibited as an 'other small fruit.' Bring one dry pint (not jar) following the guidelines in the publication 'Selecting and Preparing Vegetables, Herbs and Fruit' 4H226 (revised 2022) or 'Preparing Cut Flowers for Exhibits at County Fair and Nebraska State Fair' (revised 2022) (<https://go.unl.edu/sgpresources>).

The desirable traits the judge is looking for are all the fruit in the pint to be about same maturity and uniform in size that are free from insect damage. Husk cherries should be exhibited with the husks left on and dried.



Don't forget to fill out the Special Garden Project Evaluation at:  
<https://go.unl.edu/2025sgpsurvey>

# CAREERS

Horticulture is the science and art of growing and using fruits, vegetables, flowers, ornamental plants and grasses to enhance our living environment. A horticulturist is a person who works with plants. They can have many different jobs from plant breeding, to growing the crops, to processing and moving of plants.

## DID YOU KNOW? A DEGREE IN HORTICULTURE CAN OFFER THE FOLLOWING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES:

- **EDUCATOR**
- **FIELD OR LAB RESEARCHER**
- **FLORAL DESIGNER**
- **GREENHOUSE MANAGER**
- **HORTICULTURE ENTREPRENEUR**
- **LANDSCAPE DESIGNER**
- **LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR**
- **NURSERY MANAGER**
- **PLANT BREEDER**
- **PLANT PROPAGATOR**
- **GROWER**
- **VINEYARD MANAGER**

## >>> POMOLOGIST

A pomologist studies and cultivates fruit. Pomologists with advanced degrees are often found in universities and in the horticulture industry in research, teaching, and extension positions, developing, breeding, and evaluating new varieties of fruits and nuts.

### **Training/Education Needed**

The minimum education requirement is typically a Bachelor's degree. However, research and higher level positions typically require a Masters degree or Ph.D. depending on the job. Those with advanced degrees often teach courses in pomology in addition to their research projects.

### **Where to Study**

2- and 4-year college and university programs across the country.

### **Salary Expectations**

In May 2020, the median yearly salary for a pomologist was \$63,181, according to the Comparably.com. Want to find out more about careers like this in horticulture? Visit UNL Agronomy and Horticulture Department at <http://agronomy.unl.edu/>

