

Kang Kong

Ipomoea aquatica

Otherwise known as...

Water convolvulus, water spinach, swamp cabbage, ong choy, hung tsai, rau muong.

Background

Kang kong is closely related to sweet potato, as well as to 'morning glory', the climbing plant with large purple flowers that grows as a weed in the warmer parts of Australia. Like its relative, kang kong can also sometimes escape from cultivation and the plant is considered a weed in some places. However, it is an extremely popular and common vegetable in many parts of south east Asia.

Where and How does it grow?

Kang kong prefers damp conditions, flourishing along the banks of streams and boggy areas. The plants long, pale green hollow stems float on top of the water or creep along damp ground. The leaves are darker green, usually long to heart shaped depending on variety.

It is easy to grow simply break a piece off and put it into damp soil! Kang kong can grow incredibly quickly and yields of 10kg.m² have been reported in Hong Kong. In a greenhouse it can grow up to 10cm per day when given plenty of water and fertiliser. This is how it is often grown in Australia. Not only does this maximise yield and minimise water use, but it also helps keep the plant clean.

Preparation and Cooking

Unlike some other green vegetables, kang kong is not bitter, but has a sweet, mild flavour. The young shoots and leaves are always picked before the plant flowers to ensure good quality. Sometimes the stems are sold stripped of leaves, sliced and soaked in water to encourage them into long curls.

In Vietnam, kang kong is eaten raw as part of a salad or included in soup. It may also be consumed raw with a dip in other parts of southern Asia. Elsewhere it is usually lightly cooked, such as quickly stir fried with a savoury paste or chillis. The slightly slippery texture of the cooked leaves contrasts well with the firm stems. The stems should be added first when cooking, as the leaves take only a few seconds to wilt.

Nutritional Value

Kang kong is high in carotenoids including lutein and pro-vitamin A. It also contains significant amounts of calcium and iron. Warning! - eaten in large quantities kang kong can act as a mild laxative.



Kang kong and chilli salad with grilled lamb fillet

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