COMMON NAMES OF COMMERCIALLY CULTIVATED VEGETABLES OF THE WORLD IN 15 LANGUAGES

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Key Words: edible crops; food crops; horticulture; vegetable diversity; utilization; synonym.

Vegetable crops make up a major portion of the diet of humans. While the nutritional importance of vegetables has long been recognized within the nutrition and medical communities, there is an increasing awareness among the general public of the health advantages of diets high in vegetables. Vegetables provide not only calories but also essential vitamins, fiber, and minerals. The caloric contribution of vegetables to the diet varies widely with geographical region, nationality, local customs, and cuisine. Near the Arctic Circle, vegetables make up only a small part of the caloric intake of Aleuts and Eskimos (Bell and Heller 1978; Nobmann et al. 1992). In contrast, sweetpotatoes often comprise up to 90% of the daily diet of Murapin highlanders in Papua New Guinea (Sinnett 1975). The worldwide importance of vegetables in the diet is difficult to estimate, owing to scant production statistics. Even where crop reporting services are an integral part of the agricultural infrastructure, information is available on only a small percentage of the vegetable crops grown (USDA 1989).

In many areas of the world, increased consumption of vegetables has been stimulated by a growing understanding of the health implications of diets high in vegetables, along with an increasing variety of vegetables for consumption. Ethnic diversity is a primary contributor to changing food consumption patterns, increasing the variety of foods available. The introduction of crops to one region from another has been constant throughout history, due to the migration of people and the impact of maritime discoveries and commercial trade routes. The “silk route,” for example, was responsible for many plant exchanges between the Occident and China. As people immigrate to new countries, they take with them their languages, religions, traditional customs, and foods. Vegetables, in particular, are attractive candidates for introduction into a new environment. Most vegetables tend to be short season crops and, as a consequence, lend themselves to a more cosmopolitan production distribution. Favorled crops and cultivars, in turn, are often assimilated into the cuisine of the original inhabitants.

Received 25 August 1994; accepted 31 October 1995.

Economic Botany 49(2) pp. 115–152. 1995
In the United States, in a number of European countries, and in many other areas of the world, there has, and continues to be, substantial immigration of peoples from a diverse range of countries. For example, in the 1960s southern Europeans immigrated to work in the northwestern European industrial zone, bringing with them their distinct consumer behavior patterns and vegetable preferences (Smith 1989). Currently within the United States, one in seven Americans aged five or older speaks a language other than English at home (Waldrop 1993). The city of Atlanta is an excellent example of the increasing ethnic diversity in the southeastern United States and its impact on the vegetables available. The estimated Atlanta immigrant population in 1992 approached a quarter of a million people (Waldrop 1993), made up of a diverse mosaic of the world’s ethnic groups. For example, the Greek population was estimated at 8000; Lebanese 7000; Korean 25 000; Ethiopian 5000; and Mexican 80 000 (Murphy 1994). Ethnic markets developed in order to cater to the Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Hispanic populations. Vegetables such as pea eggplant (Solanum torvum Swartz), tindora [Coccinia grandis (L.) Voigt.], parval (Trichosanthes dioica Roxb.), and cactus “leaves” [Opuntia ficus-indica (L.) Miller], once virtually unheard of in Atlanta, are now readily found in ethnic markets. New vegetables, in turn, begin to move into the traditional markets of the original residents as superior crops are adopted by the general public, enriching the diversity of vegetables grown and consumed.

Increased exposure to new crops due to more frequent international travel and the substantially greater variety of vegetable crops available in many local markets has often resulted in confusion concerning the identity of some crops. When new crops are introduced, e.g. tindora into the Atlanta area, the common name used by the group introducing the crop is often maintained. In some cases, different names are utilized in neighboring markets run by the same or other ethnic groups. When the large number of vegetable crops is combined with the extremely large number of languages worldwide, the number of common names is in the tens of thousands. To help prevent confusion, to encourage consistency in terminology, and to better understand the extent and diversity of vegetable production and utilization worldwide, we have compiled a list of the common names in 15 languages of the vegetable crops grown commercially around the world. In addition to the common names, the portion of the plant utilized and the general method of preparation (i.e., raw, cooked, preserved) were reviewed and listed.

**METHODS**

One of the first questions confronted when compiling a list of vegetables is: what constitutes a vegetable? The term vegetable has evolved since its first use in the English language, as have many words. First appearing in 1582, the term vegetable referred to “a living organism belonging to the vegetable kingdom or the lower of the two series of organic beings; a growth devoid of animal life” (Simpson and Weiner 1989). By the 1820’s, vegetable was used in conjunction with dishes, i.e., vegetable dishes; in 1853—vegetable market; in 1860—vegetable wagons (Simpson and Weiner 1989); and in 1863—vegetable gardens (Burr 1863).

What is considered a vegetable depends to a large extent upon who is defining the term. The problem of determining what is or is not a vegetable is not new. In 1893 the U.S. Supreme Court rendered the decision that the tomato [Lycoperson lycopersicum (L.) Karsten] was a vegetable and not a fruit (Boswell 1949). Many vegetable textbooks do not define vegetable. Of the definitions found in textbooks, none were identical. Most definitions of vegetable include the following: 1) a herbaceous or largely herbaceous plant or plant part; 2) consumed by humans; 3) eaten raw, cooked or preserved; and 4) eaten as part of the main course or appetizer, rather than as a dessert (Chittenden 1951; Fritz et al. 1989; Gove 1971; Huxley 1992; Parker 1989; Seymour 1990; Soule 1985). However, when these criteria are superimposed upon the crops listed in a typical vegetable textbook, a significant number of crops are included that do not fulfill these requirements. For example, melons (honeydew [Cucumis melo L. Inodorus group], muskmelon [C. melo L. Reticulatus group], watermelon [Citrus lanatus (Thunb.) Natsum & Nakai]) are traditionally included as vegetable crops, although they are almost invariably used as a dessert or sweet. Likewise, crops that are clearly condiments (seasonings used to give flavor to foods) such as horseradish (Armoracia rusticana Gaertn., Mey., Scherb.) and wasabi [Wasabia japonica (Miq.) Matsum.] are included, apparently