

Using and Preserving Chayote

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Chayote? Is that a fruit or a vegetable?

Chayote squash (*Sechium edule*), also called vegetable pear, mirliton, chocho or custard marrow, is a vegetable and a member of the family Cucurbitaceae which includes squash and cucumbers. It is grown in Louisiana, Florida and the Southwestern U.S., though the bulk of chayote consumed in the United States is imported from Costa Rica and Puerto Rico, the vegetable being native to Latin America.

Chayote is generally a light green, thin-skinned pear-shaped vegetable; some may weigh up to three-quarters of a pound. Traditionally, availability is from October to March, but with new farming and importation practices, several grocery stores now stock chayote year-round. It is a low-calorie, low-sodium vegetable that is also a source of potassium and fiber.

Selection and Storage

Choose chayote that are evenly colored, firm and blemish-free. Ideal storage temperatures are reported to be 50 to 60°F (10 to 15.5°C); below this they are likely to show signs of chilling injury. To prevent drying out, place the chayote in a closed container or plastic bag in the refrigerator to maintain the humidity needed (ideally 90%) and store for up to a month. Examine weekly for signs of undesired shriveling or brown spots.

How can I use chayote in my cooking?

Chayote have a crisp texture when raw, and a very mild flavor. They can be peeled, cut into cubes (after removing the central seed and seed area), and used as you would summer squash – steamed or cooked in side dishes or casseroles, baked, deep-fried, mashed or stir-fried. Traditionally, as a dessert item it is halved, stuffed with a mixture of raisins, nuts, brown sugar, and eggs, and baked until tender.

Caution: It is advisable to use gloves when peeling and handling chayote, to prevent contact with the sap that oozes out that may cause skin irritation.

How can I home-preserve chayote?

[Chayote and Jicama Slaw](#) is a tangy pickle-like condiment, combining the flavor and texture of two exotic vegetables with diced bell peppers and spices. Serve as an accompaniment to hot dogs, hamburgers or simply, as a side.





[Chayote and Pear Relish](#) is a pickled twist on the traditional uses for its ingredients. Crisp chayote and Seckel pears are combined with bell peppers, vinegar and spices to make up this unique relish.

References and additional information can be found at:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 5 A Day website:
http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/5aday/month/exotic_vegetables.htm
2. Schneider, Elizabeth. 1986. Chayote. *In Uncommon Fruits and Vegetables – A Commonsense Guide*. Harper and Row Publishers, New York, NY.

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