

Boc Choy



Boc choy, also known as pac choy among other names, is in the mustard family. Bok choy is an important Asian vegetable cultivated in China since the 5th century.

Boc choy acreage in the Yuma area is minimal, roughly 200 acres.

Bok choy is actually a non-heading cabbage with an erect spiral of dark green leaves and thick white/light green petioles (both the green leaves and white petioles are eaten).

There are many cultivars of Boc choy each with unique variations (leaf forms, color, dwarf varieties) and maturity periods.

Boc choy (*Brassica rapa*) is grown as an annual vegetable plant and is native to eastern Asia and. Many names are used for Boc choy, such as Chinese white cabbage, Chinese mustard, bok choy and pak choy. Boc choy is unlike other cabbages because it does not form a true head.

Most Boc choys are essentially cool-season crops, preferring uniform conditions that are moist and in full sunlight for optimum plant growth.

High temperatures and long days tend to induce bolting, which is also known as premature flower stalk formation. Most Boc choy varieties tolerate light frosts and the Shanghai Boc choy is able to tolerate more severe frosts for short periods.

There is much confusion over the different types of Boc choy. To simplify the problem they have been divided into four major groups, based on appearance. 1) The 'Chinese White Bok Choy' is a sturdy-looking variety with thick green leaves curling outwards. The leaf stalks are bright white, curved slightly and thin. 2) The green leaf stalk type, 'Shanghai Bok Choy', has leaf stalks which are light green in color, broad, flat and widen at the base like the other Bok choys. 3) The 'soup spoon' type has thinner leaves and leaf stalks. 4) The 'squat' or 'Canton' variety is the most compact. It is short with convoluted dark green leaves. The leaf stalks are white, short and thick.

The Chinese are known to dip the leaves in boiling water and hang to dry for storage through the winter. Boc Choy has a nice mustard flavor to add to many dishes. Stir-fried, boiled, steamed or in soups, noodle and meat dishes, salads for young leaves, and pickling for larger coarser leaves.

Ginger, hoisen sauce and soy sauce are great Boc choy flavor enhancers.

Bok choy has been used in Chinese cooking as far back as the fifth century and was at one time also known as ice cabbage, because of its translucent color. This particular color, as well as the shape created by its long blond leaves, has inspired many Chinese artists to reproduce it in high quality jades.

When cooked, Boc Choy has 20 calories and 144% of daily requirements of vitamin A and 74% of vitamin C.

Don't cook cabbage, including Boc choy, in an aluminum pot, it causes a chemical reaction and alters its color and flavor.

Look for clean crisp white stalks and beautiful green leaves. Boc choy can be added to stir fry, soups (at the end because it doesn't need much time to cook); baby Bok Choy can be grilled, braised or steamed with a drizzle of balsamic, olive oil and, of course, salt. Sauté the stalks first, add garlic, add the leaves, a little sesame oil and soy sauce and serve.

Kurt Nolte is an area agriculture agent with the Yuma County Cooperative Extension. He can be reached at 928-726-3904.