

# Sin qua

## *Luffa acutangula*

### Otherwise known as...

Angled luffa, ridged luffa, silk gourd, Chinese okra

### Background

Sin quas originated in India, but are now grown in many parts of the world. *Luffa acutangula* is named for its 10 strongly defined ridges which run the length of the fruit. Its common Chinese name "sin qua" means "silk gourd", a reference to the gourds vascular system.

Most people would think that that the loofah that hangs in their shower or bath is some sort of dried out sea sponge. However, loofahs are actually a type of gourd. The one that is usually turned into a back-scrubber is the smooth luffa (*Luffa cylindrica*), but the sin qua can also be used for this purpose.

To make a bathroom scrubber, the gourds are left on the vine until they are up to 60 cm long and the skin turns yellow and hard. They are then dried until the thin skin can be easily peeled off. The seeds are shaken out and what remains of the flesh is simply washed away, leaving the fibrous skeleton. These are not just useful in the bath, but are still used in Asia as pot scrubbers and in mats, slippers, and mattress stuffing. They can even be used as engine oil filters!

### Where and How does it grow?

Sin qua vines are usually planted in spring and grown up and across a head-high trellis. The gourds hang below the foliage, making them easy to harvest. Sin quas are extremely productive plants, a single vine producing up to 25 large fruit. They grow best in a warm climate, and are sometimes produced inside greenhouses. Sin quas should be picked while still immature (15-40cm long) to avoid them becoming fibrous and tough. While they can be stored for a time, they easily lose water, becoming soft and spongy.



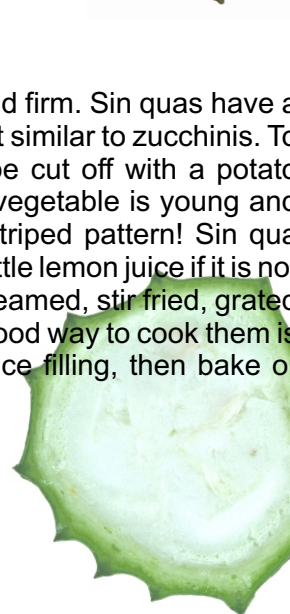
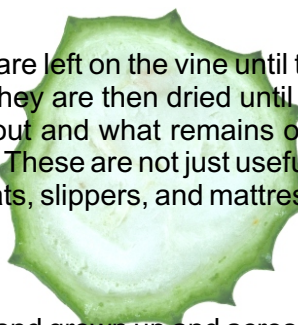
### Preparation and Cooking

Good quality sin quas should be bright, glossy and firm. Sin quas have a slightly spongy texture and mild flavour somewhat similar to zucchinis. To prepare them, the hard ridges at least should be cut off with a potato peeler. The rest of the skin can be left on if the vegetable is young and tender; this also gives the slices an attractive striped pattern! Sin qua oxidises quite quickly so it can be useful to add a little lemon juice if it is not going to be cooked immediately. It can then be steamed, stir fried, grated into an omelette or fritter or added to soup. One good way to cook them is to hollow out the centres, stuff with a meat or rice filling, then bake or steam.

### Nutritional Value

Sin quas contain small amounts of calcium, phosphorus, iron and other micronutrients.

*A developing smooth luffa*



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