

Katuk

Sauropus androgynus

Written by Deborah Birge, Fort Bend County Master Gardener



If you’ve never heard of Katuk, you’re not alone. This is a “new to you” plant that has been around for centuries and commonly used in Southeast Asian countries. It is also known as sweetleaf bush, star gooseberry, sweet leaf, babing, binahian, ngub, hvaan baanz, phakwan-ban, cherkor manis, chekkurmanis, madhura cherai, cherai, simani, and thavasai murungai.

Katuk is a perennial plant that easily grows in our area. The leaves taste like peas while the tender shoots taste of asparagus. It is often sold as Tropical Asparagus. It is one of the most popular leaf vegetables in South Asia and Southeast Asia and is notable for high yields and flavor. A quick search on the internet gives many recipes. In Vietnam, the locals cook it with crab meat, minced pork or dried shrimp to make soup. In Malaysia, it is commonly stir-fried with egg or dried anchovies. The flowers and small purplish fruits of the plant can also be used in salads and stir-fry much like

peas.

Not only is it easy to grow and full of flavor but the nutritional value is impressive. The following chart compares its nutritional values with that of spinach. The quantity is per ½ cup serving of fresh leaves.

	Katuk	Spinach
Protein	4.9 g	0.43 g
Calcium	51 mg	15 mg
Iron	2.7 mg	0.4 mg
Vitamin A	1122 IU	1407 IU
Vitamin C	83 mg	4.2 mg

Katuk is well suited for Fort Bend County because it will tolerate acidic soil or heavy clay soils. Due to its natural jungle under-story habitat, it prefers some shade but performs well in our heat and humidity. It needs a well-drained soil but should not be allowed to dry out. Keep the soil moist.

Since Katuk grows so well here, you will want to prune it regularly. Should it die back during a freeze, it will reliably return from the roots. Since the preferred crop is the foliage, the plant requires nitrogen fertilizer or rich compost to encourage rapid growth after harvest. Should you have brown tips develop you may have more salinity in your water than this plant can tolerate. If so, it will renew with rain water.

For more information:

<https://www.growables.org/informationVeg/Katuk.htm>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sauropus_androgynus

<http://edibleplantproject.org/katuk/>