

Florida Food Fare

by Jean Meadows and Mary King
Family & Consumer Sciences
University of Florida / IFAS
Sarasota County Extension



Jicama

Jicama (pronounced *hecama*) is also known as yam bean and Mexican turnip. It is not related to the true yam. The name jicama is also used in Spanish for any edible root. The plant is native to Central America and was probably introduced to Southeast Asia via the Philippines. It is a climbing legume with very long and large tuberous roots, which in five months of growth may reach 6 to 8 feet, weigh 50 pounds or more. More often, roots are round and beet-shaped with a distinctive taproot. The vining tops, which reach 10 to 20 feet in length, have compound leaves with pointed edges, and bear white flowers and green lima bean-shaped pods. These are borne in clusters of six inch-wide pods and may reach a length of 8 to 12 inches.

The starchy root tubers are usually round, 10-15 centimeters in diameter, with a light brown skin and a white flesh. The crisp white interior flesh, which may be eaten raw or cooked, tastes like a cross between a water chestnut and an apple. It is often used as a substitute for water chestnuts in Oriental cooking. As a vegetable, it is very important and popular in Mexico. It is sometimes served raw with a spread of olive oil, paprika, or other seasoning. The tough brown skin is easily peeled. A word of caution: Eat only the roots. ***The leaves, stems, ripe pods, and seeds may be toxic.***

Jicama is grown only occasionally in Florida home gardens, and a small amount is grown commercially in Dade County. Commercially, it is produced to some extent in Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Mexico, and in warm regions of the Southwestern United States. Jicama does best in a warm climate with moderate

rainfall and is sensitive to frost. When planted from seeds, five to nine months of warm weather are required to produce large roots. However, mature roots may be produced after just three months if started from whole small roots. Removing the flowers seems to enhance yields.

Also called a Mexican potato, good-quality jicama will be smooth-skinned, relatively free of blemishes, firm and heavy with moisture. Avoid any tuber that is soft, wrinkled, bruised, pock-marked or has spots of mold. Store in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. Jicama mixes well with other vegetables and fruits in salads. It can also be used in stir-fries.

Nutritionally, jicama is a good source of dietary fiber and a fair source of potassium and vitamin C. A 100-gram portion or 1/2 cup of jicama contains: 85 percent water, 55 calories, 1.4 grams protein, and 12.8 grams carbohydrates.

Recipes:

Fiesta Potato Salad Olè

2 pounds red potatoes, cooked, peeled and cubed (6 cups)	2 cups shredded low fat mild Cheddar, divided
2/3 cup diced red bell pepper	1/2 cup thinly sliced celery
2/3 cup canned black beans, rinsed and drained	1/3 cup thinly sliced green onions with tops
1/2 cup chopped jicama	1/2 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro	3/4 cup fat-free Ranch dressing
1/2 cup prepared chunky salsa	Fresh cilantro sprigs, optional

In large bowl combine potatoes, 1 ½ cups cheese, bell pepper, beans, celery, jicama, green onions, cilantro and salt. Combine dressing and salsa; pour over potato mixture. Toss gently to coat. Chill at least 1 hour before serving. Serve salad topped with remaining ½ cup cheese; garnish with cilantro springs, if desired.

Orange-Jicama Salad

Butter lettuce leaves	1 tablespoon fresh orange juice
1 large orange, peeled or sliced	1 teaspoon white wine vinegar
1 cup jicama, peeled and cut julienne style (the size of matchsticks)	1 tablespoon fresh cilantro, minced
1/2 cup red onion, chopped	Salt and freshly ground pepper
3 tablespoons olive oil	

Line plates with lettuce. Top with orange slices. Mound with jicama. Sprinkle with chopped red onion.

Blend juice, vinegar, salt and pepper in small bowl.

Whisk in oil in thin stream. Spoon over salads.

Garnish with minced cilantro.

Avocado and Jicama Salad

1 large jicama

2 ripe avocados

3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

Juice of 1 lime

4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 small red onion, minced

Course salt and freshly ground pepper

Peel the jicama by cutting off the top and bottom, and peeling with a potato peeler. Peel the stringy outside off the jicama. Cut into 1/4-inch-thick slices, then cut the slices into thin strips. Place in a bowl. Cut avocados in half lengthwise. Tap the blade of a heavy knife in the pit, twist to remove, and discard. Quarter and peel avocados. Squeeze lime juice over avocados to prevent browning and to add flavor; set aside.

Whisk together balsamic vinegar, oil, salt and pepper to taste. Pour dressing over jicama and mix to cover. Make a bed of jicama on 4 plates, and top each with 2 avocado quarters. Sprinkle with onion. Serves 4.

Tropical Mango-Jicama Salsa

4 firm ripe mangoes, finely chopped

1/2 medium jicama, minced

1/2 large sweet onion, minced

1/4 cup chopped cilantro

8 finely minced red serrano chilies,
more or less to taste

Juice of 2 to 3 limes

Combine ingredients, and refrigerate 1 hour.

Jicama Tomatillo Salsa

1 medium jicama, peeled and
diced, about 3/4 cup

2 pounds tomatillos, diced, about 1
cup

3 jalapenos, finely diced

1 teaspoon cilantro, chopped

1 teaspoon garlic, chopped

1 teaspoon shallots, chopped

Juice of 1 lemon

Juice of 1 lime

Salt and black pepper to taste
jalapeno vinegar to taste

3 tablespoons peanut oil

Prepare jicama; it can be diced finely or coarsely as desired, 1/2 inch dice is typical. Place in a large mixing bowl.

To prepare tomatillos, cut ends off, remove insides and dice skins. Add to jicama in mixing bowl. Add jalapeno, cilantro, garlic, and shallots. Mix all ingredients and adjust seasoning with lemon and lime juice, salt and pepper. Add peanut oil and toss to coat mixture. Correct spiciness and heat by adding jalapeno vinegar. To make jalapeno vinegar: Drop scraps and trimmings from 3 jalapenos into 1 cup white vinegar in a non-aluminum pan, bring to a boil, let cool and strain. Let sit until completely cool. Store in refrigerator.

Grilled Jicama

1 medium jicama, peeled, quartered and cut into 1/4 inch thick slices
Fresh lime or lemon juice

Olive oil

Preheat the grill until hot. Brush both sides of the jicama slices with a small amount of oil. Place them on the grill and cook about 1 minute per side. Remove from grill and sprinkle with lime or lemon juice.



Jicama, Shiitake and Scallop Stir-Fry

1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
2 teaspoons sesame oil
1 pound bay scallops
2 tablespoons canola oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

1/4 pound shiitake mushrooms, stems discard and caps cut into strips
1/2 medium jicama, peeled and cut into matchsticks
2 green onions, thinly sliced
1/4 cup low fat chicken or vegetable stock

Sprinkle the vinegar and sesame oil over the scallops and let them marinate 30 minutes. In a wok, heat the canola oil. Cook the garlic, ginger and pepper flakes about 30 seconds or until aromatic. Add the mushrooms and stir-fry for 2-3 minutes. Add the scallops, jicama and green onions and stir-fry for another 3 minutes. Stir in the stock and cook another 2 minutes. Serve immediately. Serves 4.



Tropical Mango-Jicama Salsa

4 firm ripe mangoes, finely chopped
1/2 large sweet onion, minced
8 finely minced red Serrano chilies, more or

1/2 medium jicama, minced
1/4 cup chopped cilantro
Juice of 2 to 3 limes

less to taste

Combine ingredients, and refrigerate 1 hour.

Makes Twelve 1/4 cup servings.

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Crunch Jicama and Apple Salad

1 ½ cups julienne strips jicama

2 red delicious apples, cubed

2 tables lemon juice

1 teaspoon grated lemon zest

2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint leaves

1 teaspoon honey

Combine lemon juice, zest, mint and honey; Toss juice mixture with apples. Add jicama and toss. Refrigerate 30-60 minutes. Serves 6.

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Jicama with Fried Potatoes

2 large baking potatoes (about 1 pound total)

1 pound jicama

3 tablespoons canola oil

1 large onion, thinly sliced and separated into rings

Black pepper

½ cup thinly sliced green onions, including tops

Peel potatoes and cut into ¼-inch thick slices. Peel jicama and cut into ¼-inch thick by 1 ½ inch square slices; you should have about 3 cups. Heat canola oil in a wide frying pan over medium heat. Add potatoes, onion rings, and jicama. Cook, turning as needed with a wide spatula, until potatoes are tender and golden, 25 to 30 minutes. Season to taste with pepper; then stir in green onions.

Make s about 5 servings.