

Monday, Apr. 29, 2013

Ask a Specialist: Should I Consider Growing Edamame?

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ASK A SPECIALIST: SHOULD I CONSIDER GROWING EDAMAME?

LOGAN – Edamame (ed-uh-mah-may), or green vegetable soybeans, has been a long-time favorite snack food in Asia and is now gaining popularity in the United States.

Edamame is a healthy snack choice. Green soybeans are a great source of protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals. They have zero cholesterol and are high in the “good” fatty acids.

If you can grow green beans, you can grow edamame. Consider this information.

* After danger of frost is past, plant seeds 2 inches apart and about 1 1/2 inches deep in rows that are 12 to 18 inches apart. Keep the soil moist until seedlings emerge. Mature plants are roughly the size of bush green beans at about 18 to 24 inches tall.

* Edamame has few pests. Plants sometimes suffer from iron chlorosis, which is demonstrated by yellow leaves with green veins. This is easily corrected by applying a chelated iron fertilizer between the rows.

* Edamame pods are ready to harvest from 70 to 90 days after planting. Varieties to consider, in order of ripening time, are: Soy Good, Envy, Beer Friend (yes, really), Early Hakucho, Lucky Lion, Midori Giant, Bee Sweet, Butterbeans and Sayamusume.

* Harvest pods when they are plump and well filled, but before they turn from green to brown. Each pod typically contains two to three beans. All pods on a given plant mature at about the same time, so you can pick many soybeans in a short time when they're ripe. To extend the harvest season, plant several varieties that ripen at different times.

* As the name "Beer Friend" suggests, edamame is usually eaten as a snack food, like peanuts. To prepare, boil whole pods in salted water for about 5 minutes. Allow pods to cool before serving. To eat, pinch the pod between your thumb and index finger to "shoot" the beans into your mouth.

* A bowl of cooked soybean pods looks somewhat like a mass of fuzzy, lumpy, green caterpillars. People quickly forget the pods' unusual appearance when they taste the beans. Edamame has a nutty, sweet flavor that even vegetable-hating kids have been known to love.

* Frozen edamame fetches a premium price in the grocery store, but you can easily freeze your own. First, wash the mature green pods, then blanch for 3 minutes in boiling water. Cool and dry the pods and pack in freezer bags. To prepare the frozen beans, cook them in boiling, salted water for 4 to 5 minutes or until the beans are heated through.

