

Bean, Moth—*Vigna aconitifolia* (Jacq.) Marechal¹

James M. Stephens²

One kind of bean seldom grown in Florida gardens is the moth bean, also known by other common names such as mat bean, matki bean, mout bean, or dew gram. The name “moth” comes from the Hindi word pronounced “mat” or “mote,” according to the National Academy of Sciences. Moth beans are most popular as a crop in India but have been tried for cattle forage in Texas and California.



Figure 1. Moth bean
Credits: James M. Stephens

Description

The plant resembles a small mat, for it is a ground-hugging plant and only about a foot high. The densely matted branches, which grow horizontally and have deeply notched leaflets on long leaf branches, are somewhat similar to the leaves of certain varieties of sweet potatoes. The hairy

branches bear bright yellow flowers that develop into short (2 to 3 inches long) smooth pods. Each yellowish brown pod contains from four to nine seeds about the size of a large grain of rice. The root system is covered by spherical nitrifying nodules.

Culture

Moth bean is a hot weather, drought resistant legume. The climatic requirements have been compared to those for Southern peas, although moth bean is a short day plant. It could be grown in the spring and fall in most of Florida and in the winter in south Florida. When seeded in early September in Gainesville, fair pod production was achieved by late November.

Cultural practices similar to those used for growing Southern peas should be followed for moth beans. Plant the seeds 3 inches apart and thin to 6 inches to allow for proper plant spread. The crop should mature in 2 to 3 months.

Use

In India, green pods are eaten as a vegetable, and the tiny seeds are eaten whole or split. A favorite Indian method of preparation is to fry the seeds in a little oil. Seeds contain 22–24% protein, but nutritional experts say part of this protein is unavailable because of the presence of a trypsin inhibitor.

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