

Roselle—*Hibiscus sabdariffa* L.¹

James M. Stephens²

Roselle is a common garden plant in the tropics and grows readily in Florida. Other names are red sorrel, Indian sorrel, and Florida cranberry. In the south it serves as somewhat of a substitute for cranberries. ‘Victor’ is a good variety grown in south Florida.

Description

The okra-like plant is an annual, 5–7 feet in height, with lobed leaves sometimes used for greens. The narrow leaves and stems are reddish-green in color.

Culture

Roselle is usually started from seed but may be grown from cuttings. It is usually started in April or in late August in Florida, requiring about 4 months to mature. Culture is very similar to eggplants and okra.

Use

The main edible part is the fleshy sepal, called a calyx, surrounding the seed boll in the flower. The calyx is bright red and acid, and can be used in preserves, jelly, juice, or a cranberry-like sauce. The size of the calyx varies with each variety, but ranges from ½ to 1½ inches in diameter. The fruits should be gathered before any woody tissue develops in the calyx. They should be tender, crisp, and plump. As much as 16 pounds of fruit per plant have been gathered in some south Florida plantings. Abundant production has been obtained in Gainesville in November. Because of its old Florida cracker heritage, roselle has been planted near the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings home at Cross Creek.



Figure 1. Roselle
Credits: James M. Stephens

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