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### Cultivation of the cape gooseberry

Roy L. Cailes  
*Department of Agriculture*

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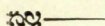
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# The Cultivation of the Cape Gooseberry



By ROY L. CAILES,

Horticultural Instructor



**T**HE Cape Gooseberry (*Physalis peruviana*) is a member of the large family Solanaceae, which includes the potato, the tomato and the capsicum. The plant is a native of Peru and Chile, where the species is known to have been cultivated for over two centuries. Records show that by 1807 it had been introduced into the settlement at the Cape of Good Hope, and shortly afterwards found its way to New South Wales, where it became known as the "Cape Gooseberry," and was the chief fruit that the colonists cultivated at that time. Cape Gooseberries have been grown for many years in Western Australia where the long summer is conducive to the growth and fruitfulness of these plants provided that summer moisture is available.

The plant is a spreading herbaceous shrub which grows to a height of up to three feet, with a spread of up to five feet. The leaves are broadly heart-shaped with a profusion of soft hairs on both surfaces. Light yellow, open bell-shaped flowers are borne profusely.

The berries when ripe, are yellow, firm and juicy with numerous small flattish seeds embedded in the flesh. A light papery husk, which is easily detached encloses each berry. The fruit may be eaten fresh, but more often it is used for culinary purposes, as cooking enhances its delicious sub-acid flavour.

## PLANTING

Cape Gooseberry plants are easily raised from seed sown in boxes or seed beds, by methods similar to those used for tomatoes. In practice, some variation occurs in the time of sowing. Seed

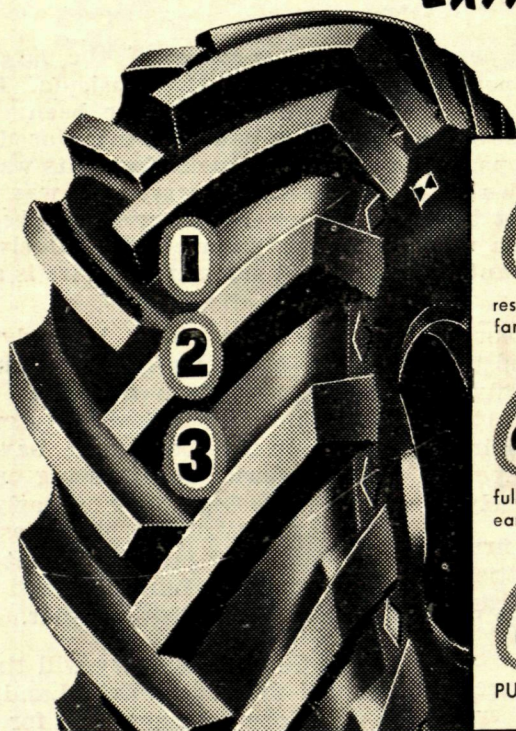
may be sown either in early autumn (March-April), or later in June, where suitable shelter can be provided. Plants must be raised early enough to make strong roots, and have strong sturdy crowns, for planting out in the field in late September, or early October (for late districts). Once established the plants are fairly resistant to frost, while they are hardy enough to withstand the long dry summer.

The Cape Gooseberry will thrive only in well-drained soils. Land with a gentle slope is most suited for planting, because of natural drainage. On flatter ground some form of artificial drainage is necessary and this may be accomplished by ridging when ploughing prior to planting. By setting out the plants at the required distances apart along the ridges, and later when cultivating, throwing the soil up to the plants, sufficient drainage can be achieved.



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In planting allow at least seven feet between plants and between rows to give sufficient space for their normal spread of between three and four feet. Use should be made of farmyard manure, straw litter or similar organic material, which will conserve moisture and at the same time, tend to enrich the soil. The plants also benefit from a dressing of  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. of potato fertiliser or orchard fertiliser per plant in September.

During the spring and early summer, light cultivation should be given to check weed growth.

The Cape Gooseberry plant is a perennial by nature and will persist for three or four years. For commercial use, it is better treated as an annual; seedling plants being raised each season and set out later in new ground.

Throughout the summer months, sufficient moisture must be present, to keep the plants in active growth. If the soil becomes dry the plants will revert to a dormant state. Where it is possible to irrigate, fruiting will commence in early summer with a peak in production in February and March. In the absence of irrigation, the Cape Gooseberry is sometimes allowed to persist in a semi-dormant state during the summer; new growth commences in the autumn with the advent of seasonal rain. Under these conditions payable crops are produced from July to October. Fruit harvested at this period, brings the highest price.

### PESTS

Cape Gooseberry plants are subject to attack by caterpillars of the potato moth which tunnel into the stem of the plant causing wilting of the leaves on the infected branches. The pest is likely to be troublesome on land which has been recently used for potatoes and for this reason such situations should be avoided.

Red spider may also attack Cape Gooseberries. Infestations usually occur

about mid-summer and cause a yellowing of the leaves and sometimes defoliation.

For the control of both these pests leaflets dealing with the subject are available and should be consulted.

### HARVESTING AND MARKETING

The fruit is gathered for market when the husk turns light brown, and the berry is clear yellow. It is usual for many fruits as they ripen to fall beneath the plants. The fallen fruits are gathered and sorted out by culling those showing discoloured husks; usually a sign that the berry has broken down. Some care is necessary in using fruits which are gathered during the late winter and spring months, because of frequent rain. All fruit should be dry before packing to prevent sweating in the container. If rain has occurred near the time of gathering, the fruit should be set out in the sun before packing.

The half dump case holding approximately 15 lb. is preferred for sending Cape Gooseberries by rail to the metropolitan markets. Small open-meshed sacks holding from 15 to 20 lb. are in general use by Hills Districts and metropolitan growers and have proved very suitable for market requirements. When packing, considerable pressure can be applied without injury to the berries, because of the protection afforded by the husks.

Market prices vary in accordance with the time of the year although there is at all times a good demand for this fruit. When the market is well supplied, in February and March, the average price is usually in the vicinity of 1s. per lb. while during the July-October period, prices range from 1s. 3d. to 1s. 9d. per lb. There is also a demand for factory fruit at remunerative price.

The keenness of the demand for Cape Gooseberries, warrants greatly increased plantings and extension of plantings can be recommended with confidence.



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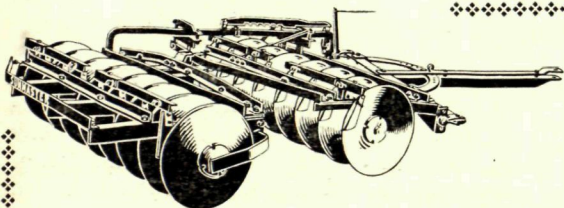
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