**Ground Cherries**

**Segment for Week of Feb 28, 2022**

This is Pauline Milbourne bringing you information on shore friendly living and gardening from the Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension. Everyone is familiar with the cherries that grow on trees... but do you know about ground cherries?

Ground cherry plants are short annuals that produce fruits in attractive green husks. When ripe, ground cherries turn yellow and fall from the papery, dry husk onto the ground. This fruit is part of the same family as tomatoes, the Solanaceae. You may be more familiar with other common names for the ground cherry, such as the husk cherry, husk tomato, or strawberry tomato. Another cultivated species of the husk tomato is the tomatillo.

Ground cherries grow in tropical, subtropical, and temperate regions worldwide. They are native to Central and South America, with some species in North America. The ground cherry bears cherry-sized fruits near the ground. The plant's leaves are hairy or fuzzy. The fruits turn green to golden-yellow and drop to the ground when ripe. The orange-yellow hue has almost a smooth, waxy sheen. The inner pulp is juicy with numerous small edible yellow seeds. Look for fruits fully enclosed in their husks — the drier the husk, the better the cherry. Occasionally, ground cherry husks drop to the ground prematurely while fruits are still green-tinged. Unfortunately, these seldom ripen.

Ground cherries can be planted outdoors two to four weeks after the last expected frost. Harden off seedlings before planting outdoors. Ground cherries prefer rich, light, well-drained soil in a sunny location. The leaves and the husks protect the edible fruits from sunburn so that they can handle extreme heat better than most vegetables. They require sufficient and regular irrigation throughout the growing season for quality fruit. Ground cherries can be grown vertically by staking, using a tomato cage, or another type of trellis.

Nightshade family plants compete for soil resources and attract similar pests. Don't plant ground cherries with eggplants, tomatoes, peppers, or potatoes. Ground cherries are notorious self-seeders. Once you grow ground cherries, ground cherries will always be with you. Keep in mind that ground cherries can become an agricultural pest as well. If you are a seed saver, properly cleaned seeds can be stored successfully. Usually, seed catalogs that feature heirloom varieties include ground cherries."

For more information or for answers to your questions, contact your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Call 757-678-7946 or 757-787-1361. You can also follow the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners on Facebook.

Learn more: [https://extension.psu.edu/.../off-the-beaten-path-ground...](https://extension.psu.edu/programs/master-gardener/counties/susquehanna/news/2022/off-the-beaten-path-ground-cherries?fbclid=IwAR0_ZKlN8w03TiAoUjbzOlmuuxoDo5YoBD1b3Nz6UNVOE_Qeu8CUqgyjaGs)