

BORDER CROSSINGS

# ORIGINS

## BOTANY BAY LEARNING RESOURCES

### Ulluco



Ulluco tubers for sale in southern Peru

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ullucus\\_tuberosus\\_\(South\\_Peru\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ullucus_tuberosus_(South_Peru).jpg)

What do Indigenous people call this plant?

The Quechua word “ulluku” is the name for a root vegetable that is widely eaten in the Americas. The English name ulluco is derived from the Quechua name. However, this vegetable is known by other names: “illaco” (in Aymara), “mellico” (in Ecuador), “chungua” or “ruba” (in Colombia), “olluco” or “papa lisa” (in Bolivia and Peru), or “ulluma” (in Argentina).

When was this plant first documented?

There are very few references to ullucos in the writings of Europeans about the colonisation of the Americas. But we do know they were widely eaten by the indigenous people from archaeological remains. According to archaeologists, the ulluco was first cultivated in regions now called Peru and Bolivia about 10,000 years ago.

How many varieties of this plant are known?

The International Potato Centre in Lima, Peru holds 360 varieties of ulluco.



Where and how was the plant originally grown and used?

Ullucos (and other tubers like mashua and oca) can be grown at high altitudes - unlike wheat. The people that live in towns and villages at high altitude trade them with people from towns and villages at lower altitudes that can grow wheat.

How do Indigenous people relate to this plant?

There are many varieties of ulluco. They come in a broad range of colours and sizes. They can be grown at high

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulluco.jpg>

altitudes and are usually planted in small plots together with other tubers like with mashua ("maswa" in Quechua) and oca ("uqa" in Quechua) and can be harvested after around 8 months. They were all grown together in the same plot and sorted after harvesting.

They are often eaten in soups and stews by the Inca people. The leaves from the ulluco plant can be eaten cooked or raw and are often used to make salads. But, because of their high water content, ulluco are not suitable for frying.

When and how did this plant first come to Britain?

Ulluco tubers were introduced to Europe several times from the 1850s, particularly after the Potato Famine of 1845 - 1852. However, they simply did not gain any popularity like potatoes and tomatoes (eventually) did. Part of the reason they were not popular is they are more difficult to grow than potatoes and have a lower yield.

Special properties

Ulluco tubers can be washed and then eaten raw. They do not need to be peeled and can be either boiled alone or added to stews. They can be cooked like a potato but still remain firm after cooking like a beet or large nut.

Ullucos are used to treat upset stomachs and to help heal sunburn, sores and reduce scars. They are high in calcium, carotene and protein. Ulluco leaves are used to make tea to treat upset stomachs and constipation.

#### Fun facts

Ulluco tubers have brightly coloured skins and come in yellows, reds, pinks and purples. Some varieties are striped.

Resources edited by Phil Hindmarsh. Project Manager Marine Begault.

BOTANY BAY is a participation and learning project by Border Crossings' ORIGINS Festival, made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to engage five schools across the country with the Indigenous heritage of plants, gardens and food.



Border Crossings Registered Charity No. 1048836

[www.botanybay.org.uk](http://www.botanybay.org.uk)