

Growing Oca in Your School

Oca is a very popular South American potato-like crop. It has been grown in Europe since the 1600's. Oca (*Oxalis tuberosa*) originated in the Andean Highlands, and was taken to other parts of the world in the 19th century as an alternative to the potato. It is now quite commonly grown in New Zealand but has never really become popular in Europe. It is a frost sensitive tuber crop, and the foliage provides good ground cover. Oca tends to have a slightly tangy lemon taste - the flesh is firm but juicy and crisp when eaten raw, but becoming more starchy if well cooked. The tubers vary in colour.

Oca schools experiment

In this pack you should have received: four oca tubers, growing instructions and a record sheet.

You will also need: Approximately one square metre of soil. Ideally a warm open site, with good drainage and full sun. A camera or camera phone – your photos may appear on our website or Flickr!

Method:

1. **Unpack the tubers carefully** so as not to damage the shoots. **Store in a dry, cool, frost-free place**, under shredded paper (not in a warm classroom!). **From mid March onwards** plant each one in a small pot of compost and place in a greenhouse or a sunny windowsill. Keep well watered.
2. Plant outside when the dangers of frost have passed (**mid April / May, after Easter holidays**). You should leave about 30cm between the plants. The crop will do best in a fertile soil in full sun.
3. As the stems grow taller they may flop over – this is normal and enables them to produce more tubers from the horizontal stems. They can be earthed up like potatoes but this is not essential. It is possible to eat the leaves in salads but do not take too many as this will affect the tuber crop.
Water if the weather is dry.
4. The tubers form very late in the season – do not harvest until all of the foliage has died off (**after a hard frost, Nov onwards**). Lift carefully and store in a cool shed or garage.
5. Excessive sourness, caused by oxalic acid, can be greatly reduced by exposing to strong sunlight for a few days. The tubers can be steamed, grilled or baked or cooked with fruit.
6. Some of the crop can be stored for replanting in the following year. Keep dry and frost free, in straw.
7. Please fill in the record sheet as you go, answering the questions as fully as possible. Good quality photographs of your experience growing Oca would also be appreciated. Have FUN!

Further activities:

1. **Compare growing potatoes to growing oca – in similar soil and growing environment**
Compare the smell, touch and taste, leaves, flowers, roots, colour, crop size, weight, season of growth, history, country of origin, culinary use, etc. Write or draw the differences and similarities.
2. **Join us for Grow Around the World**
Learn how to Grow Your Own food - from Africa to the Caribbean, and India to East Asia. Free resources, competition, training and more: www.foodgrowingschools.org/events/world
3. **Survey** - tell us what growing support your school needs and receive our free newsletter: www.foodgrowingschools.org/challenge
4. **Testing soil and improving-fertility**
<http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/sites/www.gardenorganic.org.uk/files/resources/fllp/A9-Testing-soil-and-improving-fertility.pdf> (Garden Organic, activity sheet A9)

Email: admin@foodgrowingschools.org | Tel: 0207 065 0889 | www.twitter.com/FoodGrowSchools
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RECORD SHEET: Schools oca experiment

Please let us know how you found growing, cooking and eating oca, cooked or eaten raw.

Return this form to: Food Growing Schools: London - admin@foodgrowingschools.org

Name of staff member	School Name:							
Tel:	Address:							
Email:	Postcode:							
PLANTING								
Total no. oca tubers planted								
Planting Location (CIRCLE)	POT / OPEN GROUND / RAISED BED / OTHER:							
Type of soil (CIRCLE) (Garden Organic activity, A9)	SAND / CLAY / SILT / LOAM / CHALK / PEATY / COMPOST OTHER:							
Location (CIRCLE)	SUNNY / PARTIAL SUN / SHADED / OTHER:							
Date of planting outside	DAY/DATE:	MONTH:	YEAR:					
PLANT CARE								
How often did you water?								
Did you feed them (CIRCLE), how often and what with?	YES / NO. HOW OFTEN? WHAT WITH?							
Any pest & disease problems?	NO YES (describe):							
HARVESTING								
Date of harvest (Nov onwards)	DATE:	MONTH:	YEAR:					
Total no. of tubers harvested								
Total tuber weight (in grams)								
Other observations	Sight: Smell: Touch: Taste (uncooked): (cooked):							
COOKING AND EATING								
How did you eat your Oca?	Describe - attach a separate recipe sheet.							
Would you grow Oca again?	YES / NO/ MAYBE (give reasons):							
Any other thoughts about your experience of growing Oca?	Describe - attach a separate sheet.							
Please email us 4 photos - tick (jpg, colour, label with stage)	Planting		Growing		Harvesting		Cooking	
(Optional) Write or draw about your experiment	Attach a separate sheet if required.							

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