

Bitter Apple, *hanzal*, *bateekh*

GENERAL

Origin	: Mediterranean, sub-tropical, tropical
Vigour	: fast growing
Humidity	: very arid, semi-arid, semi-humid
Propagation	: sowing and pricking out
Maintenance	: low

CONDITIONS

Urban climate	: resistant
Dessication	: resistant
Stagnant water	: vulnerable
Irrigation	: none
Salinity/ppm	: low (1000 ppm)
Hardiness	: 0°C

SHAPE

Type	: perennial
Height	: 0.3 m
Spread	: 3 m
Foliage	: deciduous

FLOWER

Colour	: yellow
Size	: 2.5 cm
Period	: March - July

FRUIT

Type of fruit	: berry
Fruit size	: 7 cm
Toxicity	: poisonous

Citrullus colocynthis, known in English as Bitter Apple and in Arabic as *hanzal*, is a fast growing, prostrate, trailing or climbing perennial herb with tendrils that can extend up to 3 metres. It occurs throughout northern and southern Africa, southwest Asia and the Arabian Peninsula, where it is widespread, especially in the Arriyadh region, owing to its hardiness in the summer. A more common relative of *C. colocynthis* is *Citrullus lanatus*, the watermelon. The leaves are triangular, grey-green and deeply lobed with three to seven lobes. The branches are hairy. The small, yellow flowers appear in summer. The fruit is about 7 cm in size, initially fleshy and a mottled green with yellow bands. Older fruits are yellow, and rattle if shaken. The fruit was used formerly as a digestive, and the taste is very bitter. Nowadays, its medicinal uses are limited, because it can damage the liver. Propagation is by seed. It grows on sandy soil, is moderately salt-tolerant, and for landscape purposes little maintenance is necessary once established. *C. colocynthis* will not tolerate frost, but recovers during summer. The Bitter Apple is very useful for open land as a coloniser and slope stabiliser. It can be also planted in extensive landscape schemes such as rock or steppe gardens, and as a groundcover.

