

Cucumis africanus

Small wild cucumber

Family: Cucurbitaceae (Cucumber / melon family)



Collection Number:

Description: The ellipsoid fruit resembles the shape of a watermelon more than a tsamma or gemsbok cucumber, though in reality it is more closely related to sweet melons (spanspek) and cucumbers. The fruit is relatively small, about 7 cm long, and has yellow-brown longitudinal stripes, as well as being spiny. Runners can grow up to 50 m long, and after good rainfall may bear up to 120 fruit on a single runner. The leaves are deeply lobed.

Habitat: The plant is widely distributed in arid areas and savannas of southern Africa. It grows well on disturbed ground, particularly roadsides, and deep sand. It is more commonly seen on the plains of the nature reserve than in the dune belt.

General information: The small cucumber can taste good, but the problem is trying to distinguish which are sweet and which are bitter. Those that have wilted must be avoided, as eating them will cause a very severe case of diarrhoea. The flesh is transparent, green and jelly-like, and makes very delicious whole-fruit jam and pickled herb gerkins, but only the sweet ones should be used. The pips are not usable.