

Turkey Gold® CHUFA

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Turkey Gold® Chufa (chêw-fa) is one of the most popular crops planted for wild turkeys. Turkeys will readily come to a chufa patch and continue using it for several months. If you want to attract and keep turkeys on you land, chufa should be a part of your habitat management plan. Chufa, *Cyperus esculentus* var. *sativus*, is an African variety of the native nutsedge, which is a warm season perennial plant. Native nutsedge can be a problem weed in some areas. Chufa is not aggressive like the native nutsedges and will not create problems when other crops are planted after it.



Wildlife does not feed on the lush chufa foliage.

PHOTO BY RON BRENNEMAN



Chufa tubers.

PHOTO BY JAY LANGSTON

Chufa foliage, which grows 1-3 feet tall, is not utilized by wildlife, rather, the small, nut like tubers, which grow under the ground, are what is relished by wild turkeys, ducks and other wildlife. Each plant produces a handful (15-75) of golden tubers a couple of inches under the ground. Turkeys begin scratching out the tubers in the fall, after the tops have turned brown. In southern areas they will continue using chufa throughout the winter and into the spring. In areas where the ground freezes and snow accumulates, it does not provide a source of food during the winter. Once turkeys begin using chufa, they will visit the field regularly until the tubers are gone or spring greenup provides a more desirable food source. A chufa patch that is being used regularly by turkeys looks like a herd of hogs has been rooting in the field or takes on the appearance of craters on the moon.

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Turkeys scratch the tubers out of the ground.

PHOTO BY RON BRENNEMAN

The tubers are high in carbohydrates and protein. They are edible by humans, having a sweet taste described by some as being like raw peanuts or almonds.

RANGE:

The general rule of thumb is that chufa will grow anywhere corn will grow. The recommended range of chufa includes the entire southern part of the United States from Florida to California, and northward to Pennsylvania, Ohio and Iowa. Chufa is now being grown in most other states as well. Extreme northern range, such as northern Minnesota, may not be suitable for chufa because of short growing seasons and limited use by turkeys during the winter.

PLANTING TIME:

In the South, chufa is normally planted from April through July, depending on rainfall. In more northern areas the best planting time is April or May. Chufa will mature in approximately 90-110 days. In areas with shorter growing seasons, make sure you have 90-110 con-

secutive frost-free days.. As it matures, the tops will turn a golden brown color. After the tops have turned brown, the turkeys will begin scratching the chufa tubers out of the ground.

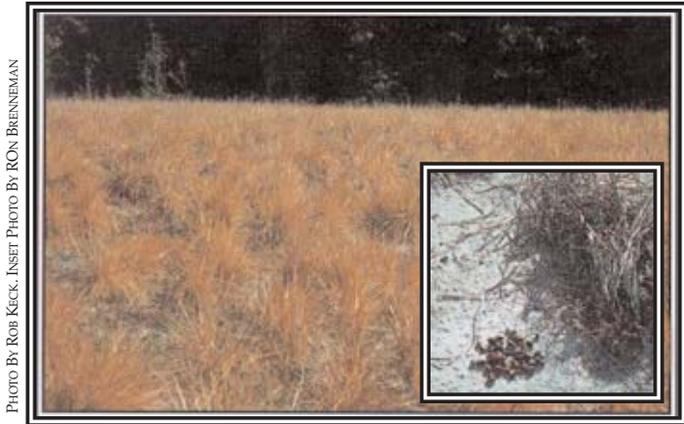


PHOTO BY ROB KECK. INSET PHOTO BY RON BRENNEMAN

When chufa plants turn brown, turkeys begin scratching for the tubers. Inset: Chufa tubers grow underground at the base of the plant.

For those planting chufa for the first time, make sure to plant Turkey Gold® Chufa in areas where turkeys frequent. You want to make it as easy as possible for turkeys to find it. It may be a good idea to pull some of the plants out of the ground or disk a strip so the turkeys will find them.

SOIL CONDITIONS:

Chufa will grow in a variety of soil types, but it does best in moderately to well-drained soils. Sandy or loamy soils are preferred, but it will grow even in clay soils. Turkeys can have a more difficult time scratching the tubers out of hard clay soil. If you plant in clay soil, run a disk lightly over the patch in the fall or early spring, after the chufa has matured, to break up the soil.

SOIL PREPARATION:

Prior to planting chufa seed, the soil should be plowed or disked. A soil test will reveal the proper amount of fertilizer and lime to add to the soil. Using the proper amounts may actually save you money. If you cannot get the soil tested, use 400 pounds of 10-10-10 or 13-13-13 fertilizer and 1,000 pounds of lime per acre. Work the fertilizer and lime into the soil with a disk or drag.

SEEDING RATE:

Chufa can be drilled or broadcast. Broadcast seeding is the most common way of planting chufa. It can be spread by hand or with a handheld seeder. The rate for broadcasting is 40-50 pounds per acre. After the seed is scattered it should be covered to a depth of 1-2 inches with a harrow or drag. When broadcasted properly, there will be approximately 3-4

plants per square foot.

If drilled, plant in 36-inch rows at a rate of 30 pounds per acre at 6-inch spacing. Drilling is not recommended because the drill can crush the seed because of the large seed size.

PLOT SIZE:

Plots as small as 1/4 acre or as large as several acres can be planted for wild turkeys. The optimum plot size is probably 1/2 - 1 acre.

GRASS & WEED CONTROL:

Herbicides are normally not used in chufa plantings for wildlife but occasionally grasses and weeds can become such a problem that certain herbicides have to be applied. The following herbicides have been found to be effective. Apply the herbicides only once during the life of the crop.

PREPLANTING (incorporated into the soil):

Treflan.....1 quart per acre

Prowl.....1 quart per acre

AFTER THE CROP IS ESTABLISHED

(sprayed over the top):

Poast + oil surfactant (controls grasses) ..1.5 pts. + 10.6 oz. per acre

or

Fusilade + oil surfactant (controls grasses)1.5 pts. + 10.6 oz. per acre

or

2.4-DB (controls weeds, Sicklepod, Cocklebur).....1-2 pts. per acre

REGROWTH:

For best production chufa should be replanted each year but it is possible to get a second year's growth out of it as long as the turkeys do not eat it all. Simply disk plot during normal planting dates to evenly distribute seed. Apply normal amount of fertilizer and lime to the soil. After two years, rotate the chufa to another field to prevent potential problems with soil pests.

SOURCE OF CHUFA SEED:

The National Wild Turkey Federation sells Turkey Gold® Chufa seed through its Project HELP, Habitat Enhancement Land Program, and has a good supply available at very competitive prices. Because of limited supplies, however, it is a good idea to place your order early, usually in January or February. For a free Project HELP brochure, contact the NWTF, P.O. Box 530, Edgefield, SC 29824, Phone (803)637-3106. You can also order Turkey Gold® Chufa online by clicking here.

If you want to provide a fall and winter food source for wild turkeys on your land, Turkey Gold® Chufa should be part of your management plan.