

GOJI BERRIES

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *LYSIUM SPP.*



SPECIES OVERVIEW

Goji berries, also known as wolfberries (pinyin: gǒuqǐ, Mandarin: 枸杞), belong to the Solanaceae, or nightshade family, which also encompasses plants such as potatoes and tomatoes. The Solanaceae family is one of the most utilized plant families by humans across the centuries, serving as a vital source of sustenance and for its medicinal properties.

While numerous goji berries are found throughout China, Tibet, and other areas of Asia, the two most prominent are *Lycium barbarum* and *Lycium chinese*. Both species produce lavender flowers in late spring and an orange-red ellipsoid berry with a sweet-tangy taste in the summer. Goji berry leaves are thin and smooth, occurring in alternating or clusters along the branch. This species of shrub is not native to Canada, however, the goji berry has grown alongside native plant species in Alberta's urban centers and backyard gardens for over a century.



CULTURAL VALUE

Goji berries have a rich history and hold profound cultural significance within the Chinese heritage. In the late 1800's, the completion of the Trans-Canada Railway led to the introduction of Goji berries to the City of Edmonton.

In the 1800's, obtaining goji berry shrubs was quite difficult, however, during the construction of the Trans-Canada Railway, Chinese immigrants planted these shrubs, not just for their nutritional value, but also to maintain a connection to their homeland and culture.

For over 2200 years, the fruit of goji berries have been documented in China for their medicinal benefits. The earliest reports can be traced back to 200 BCE in Shennong Bencao Jing (神农本草经). Goji berries are a powerhouse of health, packed with carotenoids and vitamin C, and carry high amounts of natural antioxidants. The berries are renowned for their ability to enhance eyesight and support immune system function and the leaves are utilized in treating insect bites. Traditionally, the berries are used in teas and soups, and the ripe berries can be eaten straight from the shrub.



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