

## Sacha Inchi, Inca's legacy food becomes fashionable



*Plukenetia volubilis*, commonly known as **sacha inchi**, **sacha peanut**, **mountain peanut** or **Inca-peanut**, is a **perennial plant** with somewhat hairy leaves, in the **Euphorbiaceae**. It is native to much of tropical **South, Ecuador, Peru**, and northwestern **Brazil**), as well as some of the **Windward Islands** in the **Caribbean**.<sup>[1]</sup>

In the **Amazon Rainforest in Peru**, it has been cultivated by **indigenous people** for

centuries, and will grow in warm climates up to altitudes of 1,700 meters (5,500 feet) as long as there continued availability of water and good drainage. It grows better in acidic soils and **alluvial flats** near rivers.

The plant reaches a height of 2 m (6' 6"), with alternate, heart shaped, serrated leaves, 10 to 12 cm long (4"-4.7") and 8 to 10 cm (3.1-3.9") wide, that have petioles 2–6 cm (0.8-2.3") long. It flowers five months after being planted, and bears seeds around the eighth month. The male flowers are small, white, and arranged in clusters. Two female flowers are located at the base of the inflorescence. In tropical locations it is often a vine requiring support and producing seeds nearly year-round.



The fruits are capsules of 3 to 5 cm in diameter with 4 to 7 points, are green and ripen blackish brown. On ripening, the fruits contain a soft black wet pulp that is messy and inedible, so are normally left to dry on the plant before harvest. By two years of age, often up to a hundred dried fruits can be harvested at a time, giving 400 to 500 seeds a few times a year. Fruit capsules usually consist of four to five lobes, but some may have up to seven. Inside are the seeds, oval, dark-brown, 1.5 to 2 cm in diameter and 45 to 100 grams of weight.<sup>[clarification needed]</sup> The **cotyledons** are open, similar to those of almonds, and covered with a whitish film. Raw seeds are inedible, but roasting after shelling makes them very palatable.



Leadership. Opportunity. Networking.  
2351 Sunset Blvd. Suite 170-146 Rocklin CA, 95765-4306



The seeds of Inchi have high protein (27%) and oil (35 - 60%) content, and the oil is rich in the essential fatty acids omega-3 linoleic acid ( $\approx$ 45-53% of total fat content) and omega-6 linoleic acid ( $\approx$ 34-39% of fat content), as well as non-essential omega-9 ( $\approx$ 6-10% of fat content).<sup>[2]</sup> They are also rich in iodine,<sup>[citation needed]</sup> vitamin A,<sup>[citation needed]</sup> and vitamin E.

## Modern uses

---

Sacha Inchi oil production is increasing in the Peruvian Amazon and is gaining international recognition for its taste and health properties. In June 2007, Sacha Inchi oil won the *Médaille d'or* (Gold Medal) at the AVPA Specialty Foods Commodities competition.<sup>[3]</sup> Sacha Inchi has been called a super food because of its high content of essential fatty acids. The oil has a mild flavour, not bitter, with a nutty finish. With new research emphasizing the health benefits of Omega fatty acids, interest in sustainable sources of Omega is increasing. Sacha Inchi oil is used in vegetarian diets to provide a plant source for Omega-3 fatty acids.

Humanitarian group Oxfam and a group called SEPAR are collaborating to develop techniques for growing Sacha Inchi. Used as a cash crop, Sacha Inchi is bringing money to rural areas and allowing indigenous groups like the Ashaninka to stay in villages.<sup>[4]</sup>

Also, the Sacha Inchi seed has been marketed as a health food snack due to its high concentration of Omega-3 and complete proteins.

"Plukenetia volubilis" by the lifted lorax - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons -

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Plukenetia\\_volubilis.JPG#/media/File:Plukenetia\\_volubilis.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Plukenetia_volubilis.JPG#/media/File:Plukenetia_volubilis.JPG)



**Northern California Peruvian  
Chamber of Commerce**

Leadership. Opportunity. Networking.

2351 Sunset Blvd. Suite 170-146 Rocklin CA, 95765-4306