

**Lycium chinense**, Mill.

Common names: Wolfberry,  
Matrimony Vine  
Pinyin: gou qi zi, di gu pi  
Part used: Fruit and root bark  
Family: Solonaceae



Dry fruit

**Plant Description**

Lycium is a deciduous perennial shrub to 5' tall. The arching branches are multiple stemmed; 2" bright green leaves are simple, and ovate to linear-lanceolate. Some plants sport thorns. Pretty purple star-shaped flowers fade to a tan before falling off, yielding red fruit that is variable from plant to plant in its sweetness. Lycium grows well from -10 to +110 degrees Fahrenheit, traditional USDA zones 3-10 or 11. Charles Martin reports that Lycium shows heat and drought tolerance and does well in alkaline soils.<sup>1</sup>

**Propagation**

Seeds or cuttings are used to propagate Wolfberry. Remove seed from fruit if not already done so and sow seed in spring or fall in a heated greenhouse; germination takes place in about two weeks. Plant out the following season. Fruiting occurs when plants are 2-3 years old. Cuttings yield fruit more quickly, and if clonal material is desired to eliminate genetic variables then hardwood cuttings should be stuck in the fall. The stems are adventitious and layering in the garden happens wherever the branches touch the soil.

**Field Production**

Wolfberry enjoys a sunny to partly sunny location. Row cropping with 3' plant spacing or a hedge row in a mixed planting work well. Pruning back to 2' tall when dormant not only encourages fruiting but makes the plants manageable. Trellising may be used to hold plants upright to facilitate harvesting of fruit, and keep plants from layering and expanding out of control. Plants may be invasive.

**Pest and Diseases**

Several species of birds eat the fruit. Charles Martin noted that Lycium is susceptible to powdery mildew, Phytophthora, and Fusarium.<sup>2</sup> These diseases do not appear to be major cultivation problems.

**Harvest**

Fruit has on-going ripening, making weekly harvests for a month or so in the fall the best way to maximize yield. Drying fruit in a dehydrator works better than a passive drying system. Roots are dug from 3 year or older, winter dormant plants. Wash, peel and remove bark, cut into sections and dry. Charles Martin from the New Mexico State University Alcalde demonstration garden, USDA zone 5, reports yields of 36.5 lbs of fresh berries or 2.5 lbs of dried berries per 100 feet of row, from multiple harvests of three year old plants.

**Note**

<sup>1</sup>Charles Martin, "Herbs to Know and Grow: Chinese Wolfberry." NMSU Sustainable Agriculture Science Center, accessed 8 March 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.