

OKEECHOBEE GOURD

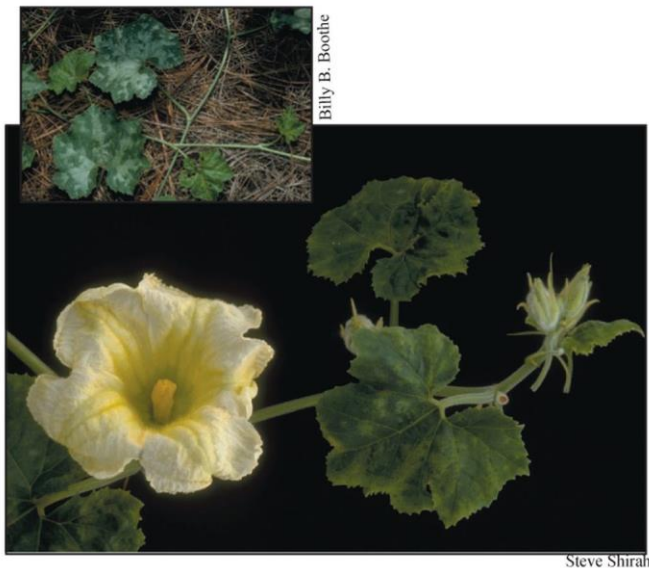
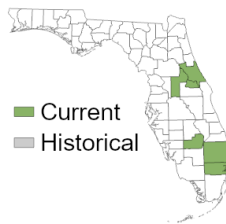
Cucurbita okeechobeensis (Small) Bailey

Synonyms: *Pepo okeechobeensis* Small;
Cucurbita okeechobeensis (Small) Bailey ssp.
okeechobeensis

Family: Cucurbitaceae (squash)

FNAI Ranks: G1/S1

Legal Status: US-Endangered; FL-Endangered



Field Description: **Vine** with long, twisting tendrils and slender **stems**, running over the ground or climbing shrubs and trees to 12 m high. **Leaves** 5 - 20 cm broad, rough-hairy, alternate, paired with tendrils, broadly heart-shaped, slightly to deeply lobed, lightly toothed, sometimes mottled with silvery-green, often with tiny, spike-like hairs on veins on under surface of leaf and on leaf stalk. **Flowers** 6 - 9 cm long, yellow, bell-shaped with a ribbed tube and 5 rounded lobes. **Fruit** about 7 - 9 cm wide, hard, inedible, round, smooth and waxy, light green with pale stripes when mature; turning tan when dry; immature fruits densely hairy. **Seeds** flat with raised margins, 7 - 12 mm long.

Similar Species: Leaves somewhat resemble wild grape leaves. Cultivated squashes, such as Seminole pumpkin (*Cucurbita moschata*), which sometimes escape into the wild, have yellow or orange flowers and edible flesh.

Related Rare Species: None in Florida.

Habitat: Pond apple swamps and mucky soils on Lake Okeechobee shores, islands, and ditch banks; floodplain forests along the St Johns River.

Okeechobee gourd

Cucurbita okeechobeensis

Best Survey Season: Spring-summer; vines and fruits most visible in fall and winter.

Range-wide Distribution: Endemic to central FL.

Conservation Status: Once locally abundant in the mucky soils of the lower Kissimmee River basin, now known only from a few sites around Lake Okeechobee and along the St. Johns River, where populations seem to be declining.

Protection and Management: Monitor and regulate water levels in Lake Okeechobee to promote germination and seedling establishment. Restore pond apple swamps around lake. Use herbicides carefully to control exotic species in lake; avoid aerial spraying. Maintain hydrology of Florida's rivers. Survey for more populations. Research biology of species.

References: Coile 2000, Minno and Minno 1995, Minno 1997, USFWS 1998, Small 1930b, Walters and Decker-Walters 1993, Ward 1979, Wunderlin 1998, Wunderlin and Hansen 2000a.

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