

## **CHUFA- Not just for turkeys anymore!**

By Tim White

Chufa (*Cyperus esculentus*, var. *sativus*) is a Spanish word meaning ground almond. It is a type of nut-grass that produces a potato like tuber under ground. Most often grown for wild turkeys, these tubers are high in carbohydrates and protein and are an excellent food source for wintering waterfowl when flooded. Chufas flooded up to a depth of eight inches are readily eaten by dabbling ducks, especially mallards. Diving ducks such as ring-necks, redheads, and canvasbacks, love chufas when they are flooded to depths over one foot. Chufa commonly occurs in bottomland under stories and on exposed mudflats of seasonally flooded Catahoula Lake in Louisiana (Wills 1971). The outer contour of the lake is dominated by chufa, composing about 85 % of the vegetation. Good chufa tuber production depends on at least a three-month flood-free period during the growing season (Merrell 1975). On Catahoula Lake, chufas supplied 57 % of the diet of mallards; 67 % of the diet of pintails; and averaged 67 % of food items eaten by wigeon, green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, ring-necked ducks, canvasbacks, and lesser scaup (Wills 1970). Martin and Uhler (1939) reported that chufa ranked tenth of all waterfowl foods in the U. S. and Canada; and ranked third in the Mississippi Valley region.

Chufas grow best in moist soils but do not do well on sites that are extremely wet or flooded during the growing season (Merrell 1975). How do you grow chufas for ducks? Duck ponds which can be drained and planted during summer and flooded during winter provide excellent habitat for waterfowl. Chufas can be planted from April through July and require 90 to 100 days to mature. I recommend that all seeds be treated with some type of repellent such as Stanley Cro-Chex before planting to keep varmints like raccoons, crows and skunks from digging them up. There are other commercial brands and types of repellents on the market, which will work well. Chufas grow best in sandy loam soils but will grow even in hard clay. Chufas may be broadcast or row planted.

For either method, spread fertilizer (13-13-13) at a rate of about 200 to 500 lbs/acre (depending on the fertility of your soil) and disk in. Treflan either granular or liquid can be used as pre-emergent weed control...use at a moderate rate. 2-4D can be sprayed over the top if weeds become a problem later in the season (follow the herbicide label). A clean chufa plot with little weed competition will produce greater yields than a weedy plot.

*Broadcast planting method:* Chufas can be broadcast at a rate of about 40 lbs/acre on the prepared seedbed. Next it should be disked into a depth of about 1 2 to 2 inches. Top-dress the chufas with ammonium nitrate ( 100 to 200 lbs/acre) when the plants are about 6 to 12 inches in height.

*Row planting method:* Row plant chufas on a prepared seedbed as described above using a peanut plate (corn plates will not work). Plant in 30-38 inch rows with a spacing of about 5 inches in the row and 1 2 inches deep. Side dress with 100 to 200 lbs/acre of ammonium nitrate when the plants are 6 to 12 inches in height. Row planting produces a heavier yield than broadcast planting.

When grown for turkeys, chufas are often regenerated for years without replanting. When growing them for waterfowl, however, they must be replanted each year because whatever the

ducks do not eat, will probably rot.

Last but not least try eating a chufa sometime. It tastes like a cross between an almond and coconut. The Aold folks@ used to grow an acre of chufas each fall to fatten their hogs on because they make tasty pork. They also made tasty snacks for the farm family during the winter. You can even make bread with them by grinding them into a fine flour and substituting it for half the flour in any bread recipe. Chufas are not just for turkeys anymore!