Bean, Jack—*Canavalia ensiformis* (L.) D.C.Bean,
Sword—*Canavalia gladiata* (Jacq.) D.C.¹

James M. Stephens²

The jack bean and the sword bean are very similar and
are occasionally grown in home gardens around the state.
Other names for them are Chickasaw lima bean, Brazilian
broad bean, coffee bean, ensiform bean, horse bean, mole
bean, go-ta-ki, overlook bean, Pearson bean, watanka, and
raba de burro.

Description

In both species, pods reach a length of 10 to 14 inches, and
a width of 1 to 1½ inches. Seeds are large, ½ to ¾ inch long
and nearly as broad. The two species differ mainly in the
length of the seed hilum (scar). The hilum of sword bean
(*C. gladiata*) is more than one-half the length of the seed,
whereas that of the jack bean (*C. ensiformis*) is only about
one-third as long as the seed. Most of the jack beans sent to
the University of Florida for identification were white with
a black seed scar, while the sword beans were red seeded.

Culture

There probably are many varietal and environmental vari-
ations in the growth habit of the plants; however, it appears
that the jack bean plant is bushy in comparison with the
vining nature of the sword bean plant. One north Florida
gardener noted that one sword bean plant covered his entire
garden of 400 square feet.

Use

Neither bean has commercial importance in this country.
Both are reported to be edible in the young, tender, im-
mature stage when the pods are sliced and boiled or peeled
so the seeds can be used as broad beans. Also, reports have
indicated the possibility of mild toxicity of beans when
eaten in large quantities. Because of this, the boiling water
should be drained off to remove any poisonous substances
coming from the beans. Pharmaceutical companies have
shown some interest in the beans as a possible source of the
enzyme urease, and a few acres have been tried in Florida
for that purpose.

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