



Cilantro

by Eldon Everhart, Cindy Haynes, and Richard Jauron

Cilantro or coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*) is a member of the carrot family, native to the Mediterranean region, and the world's most widely used herb. The seed of this plant is the spice coriander, and the leaf is the herb cilantro. The plant, in flower, can reach 3 feet high.

The foliage is finely divided and looks like parsley but has an exceptional sweet-musky flavor. Cilantro is a very versatile herb used in Oriental, Caribbean, Italian, and Mexican cooking. It is sometimes known as Mexican or Chinese parsley.

The flat clusters of pale pink flowers produced during the summer ripen into the sweetly aromatic coriander seed. However, fresh seeds have an unpleasant taste and aroma. Drying the seed removes the unpleasant odors. The round, tiny seeds actually grow more fragrant with storage. The seeds also contain an essential oil called coriander oil or coriandrol, which consists mainly of linool.

Cultivars

Strains called long standing or Chinese are slower to bolt. Examples include 'Leisure', 'Santo', and 'Slo-Bolt'.

Planting

Sow seed outdoors in early spring in full sun. For a continuous supply, sow every 2 weeks through the summer. Cilantro performs best in moist, well-drained soils. Plants grown only for their tender leaves also can be grown indoors under artificial lights or in a sunny window.

Spacing

After germination, thin seedlings to 6 to 8 inches apart. Plants grow 1 to 3 feet tall.

Fertilization

Plants that will be harvested for their foliage should be fertilized lightly with a complete fertilizer when small.

Harvest and storage

Begin harvesting cilantro leaves when plants are 6 inches tall. The young tender leaves are used in Mexican, Caribbean, and Oriental dishes. The leaves can be used fresh or they can be dried or frozen for later use.

Collect coriander seeds when they turn brown in summer. Dry the seed heads in a warm, airy place over a cloth or hang upside-down to dry inside a paper bag. Rub a handful of seeds between your hands to release the edible seed from the seed coat. Freeze seeds for 48 hours. Afterwards, place seeds in an airtight jar and store in a cool, dark place. Use ground seeds in baked goods, soups, casseroles, or potpourri.

For more information

Check these Web sites:

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