



Coriander - Cilantro

What is it and why we are trying to grow it at the GBG?

by
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There is an Alaska firm that uses coriander seeds in one of its recipes. They really want to create an all Alaska product but are wondering if there can ever be a locally grown source of coriander. So the question is, "Can we grow cilantro to ripe seed stage and harvest coriander in Fairbanks?" We will answer that question over the next couple years as we try growing the herb in our garden. If we cannot grow it in the interior they may have to look to the Mat Valley or further south for a solution to the problem. In the mean time, here is some interesting information about coriander from the website of whfoods.org.

Coriander is considered both an herb and a spice since both its leaves and its seeds are used as a seasoning condiment. Fresh coriander leaves are more commonly known as cilantro and bear a strong resemblance to Italian flat leaf parsley. This is not surprising owing to the fact that they belong to the same plant family (Umbelliferae).

The fruit of the coriander plant contains two seeds which, when dried, are the parts that are used as the dried spice. When ripe, the seeds are yellowish-brown in color with longitudinal ridges. They have a fragrant flavor that is reminiscent of both citrus peel and sage. Coriander seeds are available in whole or ground powder form. The name coriander is derived from the Greek word *koris*, which means bug. It may have earned this name because of the "buggy" offensive smell that it has when unripe. The Latin name for coriander is *Coriandrum sativum*.

The use of coriander can be traced back to 5,000 BC, making it one of the world's oldest spices. It is native to the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions and has been known in Asian countries for thousands of years. Coriander was cultivated in ancient Egypt and given mention in the Old Testament. It was used as a spice in both Greek and Roman cultures, the latter using it to preserve meats and flavor breads. The early physicians, including Hippocrates, used coriander for its medicinal properties, including as an aromatic stimulant.

There are many health benefit claims about coriander. In parts of Europe, coriander has been referred to as an "anti-diabetic" plant. In parts of India, it has traditionally been used for its anti-inflammatory properties. In the United States, coriander has recently been studied for its cholesterol-lowering effects. There is even research to support many of these claims. Many of the healing properties of coriander can be attributed to its exceptional phytonutrient content. Not only is it replete with a variety of phytonutrients, coriander is a good source of dietary fiber, iron, magnesium and manganese.

Cilantro also contains an antibacterial compound that may prove to be a safe, natural means of fighting *Salmonella*, a frequent and sometimes deadly cause of foodborne illness, suggests a study published in the June 2004 issue of the Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry. While dodecenal is found in comparable amounts in both the seeds and fresh leaves of coriander, the leaves are eaten more frequently since they are one of the main ingredients in salsa, along with tomatoes, onions and green chilies. In addition to dodecenal, eight other antibiotic compounds were isolated from fresh coriander.

Fresh coriander (or cilantro) leaves should look vibrantly fresh and be deep green in color. They should be firm, crisp and free from yellow or brown spots. Whenever possible, buy whole coriander seeds instead of coriander powder since the latter loses its flavor more quickly, and coriander seeds can be easily ground with a mortar and pestle. Coriander seeds and coriander powder should be kept in an opaque, tightly sealed glass container in a cool, dark and dry place. Ground coriander will keep for about four to six months, while the whole seeds will stay fresh for about one year.

Since it is highly perishable, fresh coriander should always be stored in the refrigerator. If possible, it should be stored with its roots still attached by placing the roots in a glass of water and covering the leaves with a loosely fitting plastic bag. If the roots have been removed, wrap the coriander leaves in a damp cloth or paper towel and place them in a plastic bag. Whole coriander will last up to one week, while coriander leaves will last about three days.

Cilantro may also be frozen, either whole or chopped, in airtight containers, yet should not be thawed before use since it will lose much of its crisp texture. Alternatively, you can place it in ice cube trays covered with either water or stock that can be added when preparing soups or stews.

A Few Quick Serving Ideas:

- In a saucepan over low heat, combine vanilla soymilk, honey, coriander and cinnamon for a delicious beverage.
- Healthy sauté spinach, fresh garlic and coriander seeds, mix in garbanzo beans, and season with ginger and cumin.
- Add coriander seeds to soups and broths.
- Use coriander seeds in the poaching liquid when preparing fish.
- Adding ground coriander to pancake and waffle mixes will give them a Middle Eastern flavor.
- Put coriander seeds in a pepper mill and keep on the dinner table so that you and your family can use them at any time.

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