

## CELERY SEED



In 2009, Yuma County growers had about 1200 acres of celery in production with a value of over \$1.2 million, a crop that has been on the rise in recent years. And, to assist in the supply of its seed, Yuma area vegetable seed producers are growing celery seed, which will be harvested at the end of June. One successful acre of plants will yield about 500 pounds of seeds. There are about 71,000 seeds per ounce or 1,120,000 seeds per pound depending on the variety of celery.

Celery seed is not well-known in Western herbal medicine, although it has been used medicinally for thousands of years in other parts of the world. During ancient times, Ayurvedic medicine used celery seed to treat colds, flu, water retention, poor digestion, various types of arthritis, and certain diseases of the liver and spleen.

Today, celery seed is used primarily as a diuretic (increasing urine output to help the body get rid of excess water). Celery seed is also suggested for treating arthritis and gout, and to help reduce muscle spasms, calm the nerves, and reduce inflammation. However, there are no scientific studies in humans that show whether celery seed is effective for these conditions or any others. Studies do show that celery seeds act as a mosquito repellent.

A few animal studies suggest that celery seed extracts may help lower blood pressure and cholesterol, as well as protect the liver from damaging substances such as the pain reliever acetaminophen (Tylenol).

Preliminary animal studies also show that celery seed may help prevent the formation of cancerous tumors in mice. In humans, researchers have found that people who eat a diet rich in lutein (from celery, spinach, broccoli, lettuce, tomatoes, oranges, carrots, and greens) were significantly less likely to develop colorectal cancer. However, celery was just one part of their diet, and no one knows whether the effect is due to celery, another food, or some combination of foods.

When Europeans refer to the seed of the wild celery plant as "smallage," they must be thinking of the size since the flavor and aroma of the celery seed are anything but tiny. In fact, you must take care in seasoning with celery seed to avoid overpowering a dish. Used properly, it will offer a warm taste with a slightly bitter aftertaste.

Much of the celery seed available to us comes from India but small amounts are also grown in China, France and California. The French variety is more mild than the somewhat bitter seed from India and China.

Celery seed has been known as a food item only since the seventeenth century. Prior to that, it was cultivated for medicinal purposes. Romans and Greeks associated the seed with funerals and looked at it as an omen of bad luck. The plant has been found woven into garlands discovered in Egyptian tombs. Today, it is used in India as a nerve stimulant as well as a tonic.

A common ingredient in pickling, celery seed accents a wide variety of foods. Beyond the typical tomato juice or vegetable salads, think of it for fish, eggs or meat dishes. Celery salt is a mixture of ground celery seed and table salt deemed almost essential to a Bloody Mary cocktail.

In North America, commercial production of celery is dominated by a variety called Pascal celery. Gardeners can grow a range of cultivars, many of which differ little from the wild species, mainly in having stouter leaf stems. They are ranged under two classes, white and red; the white cultivars being generally the best flavored, and the most crisp and tender.

With cultivation and blanching, celery stalks lose their acidic qualities and assume the mild, sweetish, aromatic taste particular to celery as a salad plant.

In the past, celery was grown as a vegetable and known for its antitoxic properties, it was perceived as a cleansing tonic, welcomed after the stagnation of winter.

Harvesting occurs when the average size of celery in a field is marketable; due to extremely uniform crop growth, fields are harvested only once. Petioles and leaves are removed and harvested celery are packed by size and quality (determined by color, shape, straightness and thickness of petiole, stalk and midrib length and absence of disease, cracks, splits, insect damage and rot).

Under optimal conditions, celery can be stored for up to seven weeks between 32 to 36°F. Inner stalks may continue growing if kept at temperatures above 32°F. Freshly-cut petioles of celery are prone to decay, which can be prevented or reduced through the use of sharp blades during processing, gentle handling and proper sanitation.

Celery is a crop grown in the Yuma area which is grown exclusively for the fresh market and can take up to 16 weeks to reach maturity.

Celery has negative calories! It takes more calories to digest a piece of celery than the celery has in it to begin with.

Celery is a member of the *Umbelliferae* family, a cousin of carrots, parsley, anise, parsnips, fennel, caraway and celeriac (celery root).

Growers plant 32-42,000 plants per acre depending on variety, time of the year and grower preference. Celery plants are raised from seeds in greenhouses; it takes 6-8 weeks to produce a transplant ready for the field. It then takes 75-90 days to produce a marketable plant in the field depending on the weather and variety.

Celery production and harvest are very labor intensive. A person handles each individual plant at least three times, once when it is transplanted in the field, once when it is trimmed and then when it is sized and placed in a carton. Celery is packed by size; the number on a carton refers to the number of uniform plants in the carton by count or in dozens. A carton should weigh a minimum of 55 pounds each and usually more.

Celery is a popular vegetable because it's tasty and versatile. But smart cooks also know that it's a great source of vitamins and minerals. Just two medium stalks of celery pack a real nutritional punch, and qualify as one of your family's 5 A-Day servings for a well-balanced diet.

Celery is from the same plant family as carrots, parsley, fennel and caraway. The name 'celery' is from the French word 'celeri'.

Originally a bitter, wild marsh plant ranging from Sweden south throughout Europe, celery was used over centuries for medicinal purposes "to purify the blood." The winner of an athletic event in ancient Greece was given a bunch of celery, much like flowers are given today.

Celery, a household staple to some, an appetizer or snack to others, either way, this beloved vegetable has made its way into millions of households over the years. Celery has its roots in sixteenth century northern European history.

Celery is often sold in loose stalks and also pre-packaged celery hearts. Celery hearts are the inner ribs of the celery.

Celery should be refrigerated in a plastic bag and placed in the crisper for up to two weeks. If the ribs are wilted, separate the ribs and place them in a bowl of ice water for several minutes before use.

Celery is native to the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and was used by the ancient Greeks and Romans as a flavoring.

Using a celery stick to garnish a Bloody Mary originated in the 1960s at Chicago's Ambassador East Hotel. An unnamed celebrity got a Bloody Mary, but no swizzle stick. He grabbed a stalk of celery from the relish tray to stir his Bloody Mary and history was made.

Two billion pounds of celery are grown each year in the U.S. Per capita U.S. consumption of celery is about 9 to 10 pounds per person annually.

Rabbits can eat a lot of celery. One may wonder if this means rabbits lose a lot of weight. However, a rabbit's natural flora of bacteria in their appendix includes micro-organisms which break down the cellulose in the celery into a form which the rabbit can absorb.

The edible celery stalk is not a plant stem as often claimed. It is a petiole, which is part of a leaf. Many sound artists break stalks of celery into a microphone to simulate the sound of breaking bones.

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