

CILANTRO



In the Yuma area, Cilantro is grown on roughly 250 acres as a fresh cut, specialty crop. After harvest, it can be found in grocery stores and restaurants all over the United States.

Cilantro, Chinese parsley and fresh coriander leaves are different names for the same plant. Cilantro usually refers to the fresh leaves used as an herb, and coriander to the seeds used as a spice. They are quite different in flavor, can not be used as substitutes for one another. The roots are also eaten as a vegetable.

Cilantro is one of those tastes that people either love or hate, and descriptions of its taste and aroma vary widely.

Cilantro was mentioned as an aphrodisiac in The Tales of the Arabian Nights.

Also called coriander, Chinese parsley and Mexican parsley, cilantro has a strong, sage-citrus flavor that many find irresistible. In general, herbs should be fresh looking, crisp and brightly-colored.

Cilantro's taste is a fragrant mix of parsley and citrus.

Cilantro is probably one of the first herbs to be used by mankind, perhaps going back as far back as 5000 BC. It is mentioned in early Sanskrit writings dating from about 1500 BC. The Romans spread it throughout Europe, and it was one of the first spices to arrive in America.

Before it is used, Cilantro should be crushed, either by hand or with a mortar and pestle. Cilantro is a perfect addition to Mexican dishes; add Cilantro to salsas and bean dips. Mix crushed Cilantro into sour cream and use it as a topping for chili, tacos, or enchiladas. Sprinkle Cilantro over stir fried vegetables for color and Asian flavor.

The flowers of cilantro are white or very pale pink, asymmetrical, with the petals pointing away from the center.

The leaves have a very different taste from the seeds. Some people instead perceive an unpleasant "soapy" taste and/or a rank smell. This perception is believed to be a result of an enzyme that changes the way they taste cilantro, a genetic trait, but has yet to be fully studied.

As heat diminishes their flavor quickly, cilantro leaves are often used raw or added to the dish right before serving.

Cilantro leaves were formerly common in European cuisine but nearly disappeared before the modern period. Today Europeans usually eat cilantro leaves only in dishes that originated in foreign cuisines.

The fresh coriander herb is best stored in the refrigerator in airtight containers. The leaves do not keep well and should be eaten quickly, as they lose their aroma when dried or frozen.

Cilantro has been used as a folk medicine for the relief of anxiety and insomnia in Iranian folk medicine.

Cilantro essential oil showed a delay in E. coli growth, suggesting possible agricultural antibacterial applications.

When cooking with cilantro, add it at the very end, as overcooking will muddy the taste.

Although cilantro is most often associated with the cuisines of Mexico and Asia, the herb originated in the southern reaches of the Mediterranean. Cilantro has been found in Egyptian tombs dating back 3000 years. It is even mentioned in the Bible in Exodus 16:31, where manna is described as "small round and white like coriander seed." The ancient Hebrews originally used cilantro root as the bitter herb in the symbolic Passover meal.

Cilantro (*Coriandrum sativum*) is a relatively easy to grow annual, requiring partial shade to full sun, moderately rich soil, and good drainage.

A member of the Umbelliferae family, which includes carrots and parsley, cilantro is one of the more fragile herbs, with its delicate, lacy foliage reminiscent of flat leaf parsley. The leaves do not dry well and should be used fresh. To store cilantro purchased at a store, cut off the stem ends and place the bunch in a glass of water and keep it refrigerated until you use them. Rinse the leaves just before use.

Despite some bad press due, in part to its awkward taste, cilantro is still an integral part of many cuisines throughout the world, and gaining popularity all the time.

Kurt Nolte is an area agriculture agent with the Yuma County Cooperative Extension. He can be reached at 928-726-3904.