SAVORY

Savory is a minor crop in Yuma County with production ranging less than 10 acres. True with various Yuma crops grown in the region, savory is a specialty crop that is unavailable in many parts of the nation during the winter months.

Savory is a herb so peppery in its flavor that since the time of the Saxons, it has come to denote not only the herb itself, but also a whole segment of cooking. It is synonymous with tasty and flavorful foods.

Most commonly used as a seasoning for green vegetables, savory’s special affinity is for beans and is used in dishes containing green beans, and a whole medley of dried beans and lentils. It is no coincidence that the German word for the herb is Bohenkraut, meaning bean herb, as one of the components of the herb naturally aids the digestion of these sometimes problematic legumes.

Savory (*Satureja hortensis*) is the most delicate of the savory varieties, both in taste and in character. It typically reaches a height of about 1 1/2 feet and produces whorls of tiny white to rose flowers in later part of the growing season. The slender pale green leaves grow sparsely along delicate reddish stems. The stems themselves are square in shape similar to all plants within the mint family. This is also evident in the aroma of the summer savory: a mixture reminiscent of both mint and thyme.

Because the leaves are so tender they can be added fresh to salads or used as a toothsome garnish. One efficient way to preserve that fresh, summery flavor is to bottle the herb in vinegar at the height of the season. The ancient Romans were reported to have used savory vinegar as one of their main condiments as well as using savory liberally in their sauces.

Savory also dries well. Once dried and chopped, it is an integral part of many herb mixtures, such as Herbs de Provence. This blend of Mediterranean herbs brings out the best in stews, vegetable dishes, pizza toppings, and shines as a seasoning for roasting meats, fowl, and fish.

Savory was often used as a hedging plant in knot gardens of the Tudor era; it is a dense perennial shrub that produces fragrant white to lilac colored blossoms that are attractive to bees. Many during the Tudor era encouraged the planting of savory near one’s beehives because of the wonderful flavor it adds to the honey.

The leaves of some savory varieties are bright green, narrow, and rather tough. They are best used for dishes that require long cooking, such as stews, or added to the water when cooking dried beans so that there is enough heat and moisture to break them down. This not only releases the flavorful oils, but also softens the leaves so that they are palatable. Savory is often used in stuffing, with vegetables, as a seasoning for fowl, and in making sausages. In fact, it is used today in the commercial preparation of salami.

All varieties of savory have a peppery bite to them, although the summer savory is milder. It has been suggested to use this herb as a seasoning for salt-free diets as the strong flavor makes food more appealing.
In California, most people have heard of Yerba Buena, the original name for the city of San Francisco. Few probably realize that the "good herb" (as the name translates to) is actually a variety of savory. The low-growing, creeping perennial is native to the Pacific coast, thriving where it finds rich, moist soil. The early settlers learned to dry the herb and drank it as a tea to cure a variety of ailments, thus earning its name "good herb."

Savory's popularity as a healing herb is nothing new. It has long been reputed to be a general tonic to the digestive tract, as well as a powerful antiseptic. Branches of the herb were tossed on the fire to create an aromatic disinfectant. Even today, because of its pungent oils, it is commonly used in toothpaste and soaps.

One of the most interesting claims concerns savory's reputation as an aphrodisiac. This belief persisted and even as recently as this century noted French herbalist Messeque claimed savory was an essential ingredient in love potions he would make for couples. As a boy his father told him it was "the herb of happiness."

Savory, an herb rich in tradition and legend, has such a fine taste that a whole class of cookery is attached to it. How many times have you heard the phrase "a savory stew?" Savory is used in herb combinations, such as Herbes de Provence, a French combination of herbs used for seasoning. It is best known for its use in dishes made with beans. It also has healing properties and has been used for centuries for a variety of ills.

The old English word, "savery" was derived from the Latin "satureia". Roughly translated, it means "satyr's herb." It has been associated with love potions for centuries. The famous French herbalist Maurice Mességué suggested savory instead of ginseng to help couples restore happiness in the bedroom. Romans used savory as a medicinal and culinary herb long before they discovered pepper. They used it as a medicinal herb for bee stings, and as an aphrodisiac. When the Romans brought savory to England, it was used there as an herb for poultry stuffing instead of a medicinal.

The early colonists brought savory to America to use as an aid for indigestion.

As a medicine, savory is used for treating several ailments. Active ingredients of savory are carvacrol, cymene and tannins. It is an astringent and mild antiseptic. A tea made from savory is said to control diarrhea, stomachache and mild sore throat. In Europe, it is often taken by diabetics to reduce excessive thirst. Rubbing a sprig of savory on an insect bite will bring instant relief. An ointment made from savory works well for relief of minor rashes and skin irritations.

Savory has a peppery taste much like thyme and blends well with other herbs such as basil, bay leaf, marjoram, thyme and rosemary. It is said that the taste of savory brings all these herbs together in a unique taste.

Savory is popular in teas, herbed butters, and flavored vinegars. It complements beef soup and stews, chicken soup, eggs, green beans, peas, rutabagas, asparagus, onions, cabbage, and lentils. Use savory when cooking liver, fish and game. Savory also works well with game that has a strong flavor.
Mince fresh summer savory leaves and combine with garlic, bay and lemon for a good marinade for fish. Make baked mozzarella sticks by cutting the cheese into squares, dip in eggs and dredge in bread crumbs with minced savory leaves.

He savories have been used in cooking for over 2,000 years.

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