

The Herb Society of America

Essential Facts for Parsley

Petroselinum crispum



Flat leafed parsley (Italian)

Family: Apiaceae

Latin Name: *Petroselinum crispum*

Common Name: Parsley

Growth: Biennial; typically 12 to 15 inches high (reaching 27 to 30 inches when blooming); about 12 inches wide; flowers tiny, yellow-green in umbels

Hardiness: Withstands frost

Light: Sun to partial shade

Soil: Rich, acidic to basic soil

Water: Reliably moist, but well drained

Use: Culinary; medicinal; cosmetic; ornamental

Propagation: By seed sown in spring

History

The three species of parsley are native to southeastern Europe and western Asia. "The generic name is derived from the Greek for rock, *petros*, which alludes to its native habitat of cliffs, rocks, and old walls, and *selinum*, celery; the specific name refers to the crisped leaves of many cultivars."¹ Parsley is the most widely cultivated herb in Europe, and the most-used herb in the United States. It became popular in Roman times as a food. "They consumed parsley in quantity and made garlands for banquet guests to discourage intoxication and to counter strong odors."² It gained favor as an attractive plant that could be used as an edging in the garden or grown in a container. The Greeks held parsley in high esteem and used it to crown victors at the Isthmian Games. They also used it medicinally, and Homer notes that they fed it to their horses. The root variety (the roots are said to be about six times the size of regular parsley) has been grown since the 16th century, but remains a small scale crop.

Description

Parsley is a biennial herb with bright green, fern-like leaves on stems that grow up from a central crown. The typical height of parsley is 12 to 15 inches. When it produces bloom and seed-producing stems it can reach a height of 27 to 30 inches. The typical spread of the plant is about 12 inches. The leaf stems have a stronger flavor than the leaf. The leaves provide a fresh taste and are high in nutrients. They contain vitamins A, B, and C and the minerals iron, calcium, and magnesium. The presence of high amounts of chlorophyll gives it antiseptic qualities.

There are three types of *Petroselinum crispum* grown in the U.S.:

P. c. var. crispum - Curled-leaf parsley.

The leaves are bright green, finely cut with a toothed leaf margin.

P. c. var. neapolitanum – Flat-leafed (Italian) parsley. The leaves are flat, less finely cut, and dark green, with a stronger flavor than *P. c. var. crispum*. Flat-leafed parsley is generally hardier

than the curled-leaf.

P. c. var. tuberosum – Turnip-rooted parsley. This parsley has flat leaves, but is grown for its large, edible root which is prepared as a vegetable.

Many cultivars exist of both the curled-leaf, and flat-leaf types. Each cook/gardener will need to determine what is available at their local nursery, and which one best suits their particular palette.

Culture & Propagation

Parsley likes bright light, but not necessarily full sun. It will grow well in partially shaded gardens. Sow seed (soaked in water, changed daily, up to three days before planting) in the spring. Parsley grows best with bright light in a rich, well drained soil. Seeds can be sown from spring to late summer. After planting, keep the seed well watered. If the soil and seed dry out, it will not germinate. It is best to thin the young plants to about nine inches apart. When cold weather comes, if plants can be protected, they will

continue to supply your needs for fresh parsley. In cold climates parsley will provide a continuous crop if planted in a cold frame. Parsley can also be grown in a pot on a windowsill in the winter. The more you clip it, the more it will grow.

During the first year of growth, if flower stalks appear cut them out to prevent the plant from going to seed. The leaves will retain a better flavor. It is also recommended that new plants be started each year for the best flavor.

Uses

Culinary:

Leaves can be added raw to salads, or sprinkled onto a sandwich. It is good in salad dressings, sprinkled over fish just before serving, or added to tomato, potato or egg dishes. It is used in the preparation of meats, stuffings, soups and stews and as a garnish.

Parsley serves as a flavor enhancer when cooked. It is best if added towards the end of the cooking time. Root parsley can be grated raw into a salad, added to soups or stews or cooked and served as a root vegetable. Mix leaf parsley with other herbs into butter to create herb butter. Parsley is one of the herbs in "*fines herbes*", along with chervil, chives, and tarragon.

Parsley is best used for flavoring during its first year. The second year is a seed-producing year and the leaves tend to take on a bitter flavor.

Companion Plant:

Parsley grown with roses is said to improve their scent and keep them healthier. It is also a good companion for tomato plants and attracts honeybees when in bloom.

Cosmetic:

Leaves infused in water make a good hair tonic and conditioner or can be added to body lotion for dry skin.

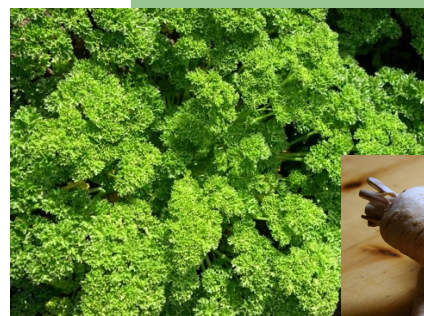
Medicinal:

Eating parsley leaves serves as a good breath freshener. A digestive tonic can be made by infusing leaves. Parsley tea improves circulation. Root decoctions can be used to treat kidney ailments, or as a mild laxative.

Topically, leaves can be used in a poultice as an antiseptic dressing for wounds, bites and stings. Also, applying juice from the roots will reduce swelling.

Note:

Caution must be exercised when using *Petroselinum* infusions or decoctions internally. High concentrations may cause inflammation, abortion, or damage to the digestive or urinary systems.



Curled leaf parsley



Parsley root

Harvesting

Parsley is best when harvested and used fresh. Cut the leaves and use them either whole or chopped, depending on the dish. If you want a stronger flavor also use the stems (they have more flavor) with the leaves. Parsley can be dried and stored in the dark (to retain color) in an airtight container for later use, or it can be placed in the freezer (chopped and put into water in ice cube trays, or wrapped in foil and placed in a zip-lock bag), pulled out, and used as needed. Freezing maintains its freshness for later usage.

Sources

Plant Information Online is a source to links to North American seed and nursery firms. It is a free service of the University of Minnesota Libraries. <http://plantinfo.umn.edu>

- 1)Tucker, Arthur O., Ph.D., and Thomas DeBaggio. 2009. The encyclopedia of herbs. Timber Press. Portland, Oregon. Pg. 393-394.
- 2)Bremness, Lesley. 1998. The complete book of herbs. Dorling Kindersley. London. Pg. 108

Additional References

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- Hemphill, John and Rosemary. *Herbs Their Cultivation and Usage*. Blandford Press. Dorset, 1984.
- Schlosser, Katherine. *Essential Guide to Growing and Cooking with Herbs*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 2007.
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