

Herb of the year 2021

Petroselinum sp. Italian and curly leaf parsley.

Parsley is a flowering biennial plant native to the Mediterranean. The most common types of parsley used are the French curly variety and Italian flat-leaved variety, also known as Italian parsley (*Petroselinum crispum* var. *neapolitanum*). Italian parsley is generally preferred for its richer, more robust taste and curly parsley is often used as a plate garnish but you can substitute. Parsley is valued for its ability to blend with other flavors. It should be added to hot dishes at the last minute or to simmering dishes in the last 30 minutes.

Parsley is a biennial plant that is typically grown as an annual. If left to overwinter it will usually, flower, set seed and die. Which means seeds can be collected in the 2nd year for future planting, however, once it flowers the 2nd year leaves tend to become bitter. The plant attracts several species of wildlife and it is a favorite of the Swallowtail butterfly caterpillar. Bees and other pollinators will visit the flowers in the second year and small birds such as goldfinches will eat the seeds.

It is hardy in Zones 4 to 9, and prefers a sunny to partly sunny and well-drained spot. It can be grown from seed but because germination is slow, they are often started indoors early, or winter-sown. Plant seedlings 8-10 inches apart near the last frost date for your area. Parsley is a member of the same family as dill, has a long tap root and, once established, does not transplant well.

You can harvest parsley throughout the growing season by cutting stems at the bottom. As with most herb, harvest in the morning after the dew has dried but before the heat of the day wilts the leaves. Upright sprigs can be kept fresh in water for several days. Small amounts can be dried by first washing and gently patting dry. Strip the leaves from the stems and dry on a screen or paper towels, taking care that the leaves do not touch. You can also gather a small number of sprigs together, secure with a rubber band, and hang using a clothes pin tucked in the rubber band. It is best to dry parsley (and other herbs) away from the sun in a warm, dry and well-ventilated location. When

the leaves are crisp, you can store the dried parsley in an airtight container in a cool, dark and dry place.

Over the years, parsley has been used to treat conditions like high blood pressure. Parsley extract has been shown to have antibacterial properties in test-tube studies, however, more research is needed. Today it is widely used as a fresh culinary herb or dried spice. It's bright green in color and has a mild, bitter flavor that pairs well with many recipes.

Parsley provides great nutritional value and offers many potential health benefits. It contains Vitamins A, C, K along with folate and potassium. Parsley is rich in vitamin K, which is an essential nutrient for optimal bone health. Eating foods high in this nutrient has been linked to a reduced risk of fractures and improved bone mineral density.

Parsley contains many powerful antioxidants including flavonoids and carotenoids. Carotenoids are pigments found in plants that have antioxidant activity, which may help prevent cell damage and lower the risk of certain diseases. Foods high in Vit C and antioxidants may provide a cancer fighting benefit. Lutein, beta carotene, and zeaxanthin are three carotenoids in parsley that help protect your eyes and promote healthy vision. The vitamins and beneficial plant compounds in parsley may improve bone health, protect against chronic diseases, and provide antioxidant benefits. You can easily incorporate dried or fresh leaves into your diet by adding them to soups, salads, marinades, and sauces.