

Parsley, *Petroselinum crispum*



Parsley is an herb grown for the pungent flavored leaves.

characteristic aroma, although it is strongest in the roots. Curly leaf types have much less essential oil than broad-leaved types, so therefore the flat-leaf types have a more pungent, sweet flavor.

Parsley, *Petroselinum crispum*, is a hardy biennial in the carrot family (Umbelliferae/Apiaceae) generally grown for its flavorful, dark green leaves that are a rich source of vitamin C, vitamin A and iron. The varieties *neapolitanum* (plain, flat, or Italian parsley) and *crispum* (common or curly-leaved) are grown for their leaves, while the lesser-known *tuberosum* (Hamburg or turnip-rooted) is grown for its enlarged, edible root as well as for the leaves. The rosette of leafy stems grows 12-18" tall in the first year. The plants produce greenish-yellow flowers in compound umbels followed by small, ridged seeds in their second year. All plant parts have the same



The leaves may be flat or curled.

This plant is probably originated in the eastern Mediterranean, but became popular throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, when it was commonly grown in monasteries and royal gardens. The ancient Greeks associated parsley with Achromous, the Herald of Death, and covered their tombs with wreaths of this herb.

At one time superstition held that only pregnant women or witches could grow parsley. These days no such cultural restrictions prevent the rest of us from growing this plant. It can be grown from seed or purchased as transplants in the spring. Start seeds indoors 8-10 weeks before last frost. Like other



Germination of parsley seeds can be erratic.

although the leaf flavor is not as good in the second season. Flat-leaved types seem to do better over the winter than curly types.

members of the parsley family, seeds have an erratic and low germination rate even under optimum conditions. Soak the seeds overnight to enhance germination. Parsley is not easily moved, so try to disturb the taproot as little as possible when transplanting. Place the plants 6-12" apart in relatively rich soil (more so than for other herbs which typically are best grown in unfertile soils). Alternatively, seeds can be sown directly outdoors in spring once the soil has warmed. Keep the seeds evenly moist; they make take several weeks to germinate, especially in cool, wet soils. For continuous harvest throughout the growing season, make a few sequential plantings through mid-summer. A fall sowing may sometimes be successfully overwintered for harvest in early spring,

Parsley can also be grown a pot to keep indoors year round or over the winter for a supply of fresh leaves. Keep the plant in bright light, water well, and fertilize regularly.

Parsley doesn't have to be restricted to the vegetable garden. Types with frilly leaves are especially nice foils to broad-leaved plants – either of other vegetables or mixed with flowering plants. Try mixing curly leaf parsley in an ornamental planting of purple-leaved basil, colorful Swiss chard and short marigolds or other annual flowers. Or edge a bed of flowers with the low, fine-leaved parsley plants. Even in the second year when the plants go to seed, the flower stalks can add architectural interest to the garden.



Parsley can be used as an ornamental.

There are a number of insect pests of parsley, but few are serious in the home garden. Aphids are the most common and often are controlled by naturally occurring predators or parasites. Hosing off the plants can keep aphid populations at tolerable levels, or registered insecticides



The larvae of black swallowtail feeding on parsley.

can be used (be sure to read the label first and follow directions). Parsley is a host plant for black swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio polyxenes*) caterpillars, but are seldom numerous enough to cause much damage and can easily be controlled by handpicking. Septoria leaf spot, caused by the fungus *Septoria apiicola*, is the most common disease of parsley. Because it can be seed borne, it is important to purchase quality seed.

Leaves can be harvested at any time during the season, as soon as sufficient growth has been made. Pinch off sprigs as needed, or cut the entire plant if larger quantities are needed or at the end of the season. Leaves are most often used fresh, but both the leaves and roots retain their flavor when dried. Dig turnip-rooted varieties in late fall.

There are many culinary uses for parsley beyond just a garnish. The leaves can be used for flavor in soups, vegetables, salads, meats and other dishes. Parsley butter or parsley mayonnaise can be used in almost any dish for mild flavor and rich green color. Parsley is one of the main components of tabbouleh, often regarded as the national dish of Lebanon, a Middle Eastern salad of bulgar wheat, onion, lemon juice, chopped vegetables such as cucumber or tomato, and large amounts of chopped fresh parsley and mint leaves. A similar Turkish salad, kisir, uses tomato paste instead of lemon juice and often includes pomegranate concentrate. Chopped parsley and garlic in olive oil make a Mediterranean sauce to serve over broiled fish. As the flavor and nutrients of parsley are lost when heated, parsley leaves should be added at the end of cooking. Parsley roots can be used in soups, roasted with other root vegetables, or mashed in combination with potatoes.



Parsley is an important ingredient in many dishes.



Leaves are generally used fresh.

In addition to its traditional role as a garnish, parsley has been touted as a cure for head lice (an infusion of the leaves applied to the head for 30 minutes); the seeds are a strong diuretic and are suggested to treat urinary infections; and parsley poultices are promoted as a dressing for wounds and insect bites. The leaves are rich in vitamins A and C and a good source of iron.

– *Susan Mahr, University of Wisconsin - Madison*

Additional Information:

- Parsley – University of Minnesota Yard & Garden Brief at www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/M1221.html
- *Petroselinum crispum* – on Floridata at www.floridata.com/ref/p/petr_cri.cfm