

Parsley



The delicious and vibrant taste and wonderful healing properties of parsley are often ignored in its popular role as a table garnish. Highly nutritious, parsley can be found year round in your local supermarket.

Parsley is the world's most popular herb. It derives its name from the Greek word meaning "rock celery" (parsley is a relative to celery). It is a biennial plant that will return to the garden year after year once it is established.

Health Benefits

A sprig of parsley can provide much more than a decoration on your plate. Parsley contains two types of unusual components that provide unique health benefits. The first type is volatile oil components—including *myristicin*, *limonene*, *eugenol*, and *alpha-thujene*. The second type is flavonoids—including *apiin*, *apigenin*, *crisoeriol*, and *luteolin*.

Promote Optimal Health

Parsley's volatile oils—particularly myristicin—have been shown to inhibit tumor formation in animal studies, and particularly, tumor formation in the lungs. Myristicin has also been shown to activate the enzyme *glutathione-S-transferase*, which helps attach the molecule glutathione to oxidized molecules that would otherwise do damage in the body. The activity of parsley's volatile oils qualifies it as a "chemoprotective" food, and in particular, a food that can help neutralize particular types of carcinogens

(like the *benzopyrenes* that are part of cigarette smoke and charcoal grill smoke).

A Rich Source of Anti-Oxidant Nutrients

The flavonoids in parsley—especially luteolin—have been shown to function as antioxidants that combine with highly reactive oxygen-containing molecules (called oxygen radicals) and help prevent oxygen-based damage to cells. In addition, extracts from parsley have been used in animal studies to help increase the antioxidant capacity of the blood. In addition to its volatile oils and flavonoids, parsley is an excellent source of [vitamin C](#) and a good source of vitamin A (notably through its concentration of the pro-vitamin A carotenoid, beta-carotene).

Vitamin C has many different functions. It is the body's primary water-soluble antioxidant, rendering harmless otherwise dangerous free radicals in all water-soluble areas of the body. High levels of free radicals contribute to the development and progression of a wide variety of diseases, including atherosclerosis, colon cancer, diabetes, and asthma. This may explain why people who consume healthy amounts of vitamin C-containing foods have reduced risks for all these conditions. Vitamin C is also a powerful anti-inflammatory agent, which explains its usefulness in conditions such as osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. And since vitamin C is needed for the healthy function of the immune system, it can also be helpful for preventing recurrent ear infections or colds.

Beta-carotene, another important antioxidant, works in the fat-soluble areas of the body. Diets with beta-carotene-rich foods are also associated with a reduced risk for the development and progression of conditions like atherosclerosis, diabetes, and colon cancer. Like vitamin C, beta-carotene may also be helpful in reducing the severity of asthma, osteoarthritis, and rheumatoid arthritis. And beta-carotene is converted by the body to vitamin A, a nutrient so important to a strong immune system that its nickname is the "anti-infective vitamin."

Parsley for a Healthy Heart

Parsley is a good source of folic acid, one of the most important B vitamins. While it plays numerous roles in the body, one of its most critical roles in

relation to cardiovascular health is its necessary participation in the process through which the body converts *homocysteine* into benign molecules. Homocysteine is a potentially dangerous molecule that, at high levels, can directly damage blood vessels, and high levels of homocysteine are associated with a significantly increased risk of heart attack and stroke in people with atherosclerosis or diabetic heart disease. Enjoying foods rich in folic acid, like parsley, is an especially good idea for individuals who either have, or wish to prevent, these diseases. Folic acid is also a critical nutrient for proper cell division and is therefore vitally important for cancer-prevention in two areas of the body that contain rapidly dividing cells—the colon, and in women, the cervix.

Protection against Rheumatoid Arthritis

While one study suggests that high doses of supplemental vitamin C makes osteoarthritis, a type of degenerative arthritis that occurs with aging, worse in laboratory animals, another indicates that vitamin C-rich foods, such as parsley, provide humans with protection against inflammatory polyarthritis, a form of rheumatoid arthritis involving two or more joints. The findings, presented in the *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases* were drawn from a study of more than 20,000 subjects who kept diet diaries and were arthritis-free when the study began, and focused on subjects who developed inflammatory polyarthritis and similar subjects who remained arthritis-free during the follow-up period. Subjects who consumed the lowest amounts of vitamin C-rich foods were more than three times more likely to develop arthritis than those who consumed the highest amounts. So, next time parsley appears on your plate as a garnish, recognize its true worth and partake of its abilities to improve your health. As an added bonus, you'll also enjoy parsley's legendary ability to cleanse your palate and your breath at the end of your meal.

Description

While parsley is a wonderfully nutritious and healing food, it is often underappreciated. Most people do not realize that this vegetable has more uses

than just being a decorative garnish that accompanies restaurant meals. They do not know that parsley is actually a storehouse of nutrients and that it features a delicious green and vibrant taste.

The two most popular types of parsley are curly parsley and Italian flat leaf parsley. The Italian variety has a more fragrant and less bitter taste than the curly variety. There is also another type of parsley known as turnip-rooted (or Hamburg) that is cultivated for its roots, which resemble salsify and burdock. Parsley belongs to the *Umbelliferae* family of plants, and its Latin name is *Petroselinum crispum*.

History

Parsley is native to the Mediterranean region of Southern Europe. While it has been cultivated for more than 2,000 years, parsley was used medicinally prior to being consumed as a food. The ancient Greeks held parsley to be sacred, using it to not only adorn victors of athletic contests, but also for decorating the tombs of the deceased. The practice of using parsley as a garnish actually has a long history that can be traced back to the civilization of the ancient Romans.

While it is uncertain when parsley began to be consumed as a seasoning, it seems to be sometime in the Middle Ages in Europe. Some historians credit Charlemagne with its popularization since he had it grown on his estates.

In some countries, the curly leaf variety is more popular. This may have its roots in the ancient preference for this type since people were oftentimes reticent to consume the flat leaf variety because it resembled fool's parsley, a poisonous weed.

Turnip-rooted (or Hamburg) parsley, a relatively new species, having only been developed within the past two hundred years, has only recently begun gaining popularity.

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