



Tasty, Healthy, Pretty Parsley

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

When picking up herbs for culinary use, be sure to bring home a few parsley plants. Four to 6 will fulfill the flavoring needs for most families. Parsley plants are attractive enough to use in ornamental beds or mixed containers if room is lacking in the vegetable plot or herb garden.

Parsley has been grown since ancient times but not always for culinary purposes. Surprisingly, this plant was once associated with death and even, the devil. During ancient Greek and Roman times, it was symbolic of death and was used in funeral ceremonies and to decorate graves. Perhaps because of these ancient traditions, during the Middle Ages, it was said to visit the devil 9 times after seeds were planted as it takes 2 to 4 weeks for them to germinate. FYI – It's wickedness could be nullified if seeds were sown on Good Friday under a rising moon!



Italian Flat Leaved Parsley. Photo by dmp.

Because of its slow germination, most people choose to purchase plants. There are 2 main types of parsley, curly leaved and flat leaved. Typically, the curly type is used as a garnish while the flat leaved varieties are favored for cooking. Both types are not only edible but high in vitamin C, vitamin A, several B vitamins as well as calcium and iron. This year a new variety of parsley was offered by Johnny's Select Seeds. The leaves are fine and feathery, resembling dill.

All types of parsley have similar growing requirements. They do best in full sun to part shade in a fertile, well-drained soil with a pH in the mid 6s.

Parsley is a biennial, meaning the plant produces foliage in year one, overwinters and then in its second year, the plant blooms and produces seeds. Leaf flavor is best during its first year of growth. Many gardeners, including myself, like to leave a few plants to overwinter and bloom. The flat-topped clusters of flowers attract many pollinators. If left to go to seed, often plants will reseed themselves saving you from buying new plants.

Whole leaves can be harvested throughout the growing season. Cut them right to the base and this will encourage new stems to form. A handful of parsley lasts longer if set in a glass of water in the refrigerator. I like to cover loosely with a plastic bag to keep leaves from drying out.

If there are too many leaves to use fresh, they can be either dried or frozen for later use. To dry traditionally, a handful of stems can be tied and hung in a warm, dark spot to dry. Most folks today use their microwaves to dry herbs. Leaves are cut from the stems and laid on a plate lined with a paper towel. Cover loosely with another paper towel and microwave at 30 to 45 second bursts depending on how powerful your microwave is. It may take some experimenting to come up with the right timing. Once the leaves are dry, they can be crumbled and stored in an airtight container.

When freezing, remove the leaves from the stems, wash and pat dry. Either place these leaves in freezer bags as is or they can be pureed with a little water and then set in ice cube trays to freeze. These parsley cubes can then be popped out and stored in freezer bags or other suitable containers.

The only 'pest' that I have encountered on my parsley plants is the parsley worm, which is actually the striped larvae of the beautiful black swallowtail butterfly. So I try to grow a few extra plants so I can share my parsley with this beautiful caterpillar.

If you have questions about growing parsley or if you have any other gardening questions, contact the UConn Home & Garden Education at (877) 486-6271 or www.homegarden.cahnrc.uconn.edu or your local Cooperative Extension Center.