

Parsley — *Petroselinum crispum* (Mill.) Nym.¹

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Parsley, including both leaf and root type, is a member of the same family as celery: Umbelliferae. The plant is native to the same Mediterranean area as celery. The name “Petroselinum” is derived from the Greek word “petros” which means “stone,” referring to the plant’s habit of growing in rocky places. “Selinon” was the Greek word for parsley in ancient history.



Figure 1.

Both the crowded, dense-leaved type and the broad open-growing type were described in the 4th century B.C. Parsley was introduced into England from Sardinia in 1548. European colonists brought parsley to the United States in the 17th century, and it continues to be a popular garden vegetable nationwide. It is grown throughout Florida, both as a commercial crop of minor importance in the vegetable producing areas of central and south Florida, and

in gardens from Key West to Pensacola. Also, it is a popular container-grown plant for limited-space situations.

DESCRIPTION

There are numerous cultivated varieties of parsley, including ‘Curled Leaf,’ a very finely divided leaf type; ‘Italian’ (or plain-leaf), a less decorative but flavorful parsley that most closely resembles the original noncurly plants of Europe; ‘Hamburg,’ whose white roots resemble young parsnips in appearance and use; ‘Neapolitan’ (or celery leaf), grown for its leaf stalks, which are eaten like celery; and ‘Dwarf,’ suitable both for ornamental and culinary purposes.

CULTURE

Parsley is a cool season biennial grown as an annual from September through May in Florida. It is propagated by planting seeds, which germinate better if soaked for 24 hours before planting. Seed should be sown very shallowly, about ¼-inch deep, and covered with a thin mulch layer until the seedlings appear. Seed germination may take from 7 to 12 days. Seedlings may be transplanted later.

Only a few plants will serve the needs of most families, and these may be grown in containers. Space plants 2 to 3 inches apart in rows spaced 1 foot apart in the garden. Keep the soil well watered, as parsley requires very moist soil. Careful weeding is necessary. A complete fertilizer at planting time followed by monthly feeding with a nitrogen fertilizer is best on most Florida soils.

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USE

Parsley leaves are ready for use about 3 months after seeding. A few leaves at a time may be removed from each plant, or the entire bunch of leaves may be removed for use. Although parsley leaves are used most commonly in the fresh green condition as a garnish, their characteristic flavor and green color can be retained if the leaves are dried rapidly. Dehydrated parsley flakes are produced from parsley grown in commercial fields.

Green parsley leaves have a mild, agreeable flavor, and are an excellent source of vitamin C, iodine, iron, and other minerals. Quite often parsley is left on the plate to become the last bite, as it tends to sweeten the breath.