

Chicory—*Cichorium intybus* L.¹

James M. Stephens²

Chicory has several common names because of its many uses, forms, and varieties. Some of the more frequently used names are succory, Belgian endive, French endive, chicon, witloof chicory, and Italian dandelion. Chicory belongs to the same genus as common endive. In fact, the Florida vegetable trade often refers to endive as chicory as a means of separating curly endive from the broader leafed escarole.



Figure 1. Chicory
Credits: James M. Stephens

Description of Types

True chicory is a root vegetable whose green leafy tops also are used as cooking greens or in salads. Roots of certain varieties are ground to make the well-known coffee supplement, while others are forced in order to grow the delectable salad vegetable known as French endive.



Figure 2. French endive
Credits: Blue Goose, Inc.

While there are several new varieties of chicory, those most often encountered are ‘Common Chicory,’ ‘Brunswick,’ ‘Magdeburg,’ ‘Radichetta,’ ‘Radicchio,’ and ‘Asparagus.’ Common chicory was gathered wild all over Europe for

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centuries for use in salads. The cultivated types lost their bitterness so that leaves could be eaten raw or cooked. When the roots are forced, a blanched vegetable results known as *barbe-de-capuchin*, which is similar to French endive.

The common chicory plant resembles a large dandelion plant with long slender pointed leaves deeply notched or toothed. The leaf color is dark green with some red tones. Usually the plant is low growing, but wild forms have been found to grow 6 feet tall. 'Radichetta,' a present day variety of common chicory, is characterized by its reddish color.

'Brunswick' and 'Magdeburg' are large-rooted varieties that are grown for use as a coffee substitute. The roots are 2 inches thick at the top and 12 inches long. 'Brunswick' has deeply cut leaves like dandelion leaves, while the 'Magdeburg' has erect, undivided leaves. The leaves, somewhat resembling those of mustard and turnips, are about 15 inches long and grow in a whorl from the top of the bulbous roots. 'Magdeburg' is the more vigorous of the two varieties.

A subvariety of the 'Magdeburg' is 'Witloof,' which has very broad leaves making it suitable for the production of French endive, Belgian endive, or witloof chicory. The edible part is a compact head of blanched leaves closely resembling the inner portion of romaine lettuce. Another broadleaf type is *radicchio*.

Culture

All forms of chicory mentioned grow well in Florida gardens for production of leafy tops. Sow seeds in September through March, for the tops will withstand frost and low temperatures (20°F) for short periods. If growing just for the leaves, without intention of forcing the roots, sow thickly as for mustard, then cut the leaves as needed.

Seeds also may be sown indoors, and the seedlings may be transplanted to the garden. When transplanted, chicory should be spaced about 6 to 10 inches apart in rows spaced 2 to 3 feet apart.

When growing chicory for forcing, you must first grow the roots, then dig them up, replant, and force a top to grow. The roots do not need a rest period and may be forced at any time they are large enough.

Dig and trim to 6-inch length roots that are from 1 to 2 inches in diameter. Place the roots upright an inch apart in a box or bed. Cover them with moist sand or sandy soil. No

fertilizer is needed since the root will produce leafy sprouts from its own stored food reserves. Keep the forcing bed in a dark, warm place. An 8-inch layer of clean white sand is sometimes placed on top of the roots to exclude light as the shoots should be clean and well-blanched. Growth increases with heat so try to keep the temperature at about 70°F.