

Cilantro (*Coriandrum sativum*) is one of America's favorite herbs, and is well known for its use in salsas and ethnic dishes. Though easy to grow from seed, it grows quickly and has a short window of time during which it may be harvested. Many gardeners are disappointed with its very short lifespan and the frequent need to replant. Cilantro is also difficult to preserve for winter use, as it does not dry or freeze well. With the popularity of Cilantro continuing to grow in the United States, it is exciting to discover a lesser-known herb with a similar flavor and longer harvest time than Cilantro.

Culantro (*Eryngium foetidum*) can be found growing wild in shaded moist conditions in Central America, Southeast Asia, West Africa and the Caribbean. The plants are small, with a rosette of lance-shaped, dark green, 4-8" long leaves. Though the plants are slow to start from seed, once established, Culantro will yield fresh leaves until frost, and can also be grown inside the house.



Growing Culantro:

Unlike Cilantro, which are easy to plant directly in garden soil, Culantro seeds are small and should be started indoors. Culantro seeds are notoriously slow to germinate, but providing bottom heat will speed the process. Once germinated, seedlings can be transplanted outside or into containers. It is important to provide the seedlings with plenty of water and shade. Plants will begin to yield leaves large enough for harvesting about 10 weeks after seeding. Provide the plants with as much shade as possible, as full sun causes the leaves to be tough and spiny, and the plants will begin to flower. Even when kept in shady conditions the plants will begin to flower, sending up a leafless stalk with spiky, light green blooms. Pinch this flowering stalk, or cut the entire rosette of leaves off at soil level. The plants will quickly recover and begin yielding again.

Using Culantro:

Though the flavor of Culantro is similar to that of Cilantro, it is much more versatile in the kitchen. Culantro leaves are thicker and much more succulent than those of Cilantro and can be dried or frozen easily. Leaves can also be added to simmering stews or other cooked dishes without the fear of the leaves disintegrating before the meal is served. Culantro is an ingredient in the Puerto Rican condiment Sofrito, a chopped mixture of peppers, garlic, onion, cilantro and culantro that is often served with rice or stews.