



Scorzonera (*Scorzonera hispanica*)

Scorzonera is a perennial root vegetable, similar to salsify in its tapered shape, averaging 9–11" in length and $\frac{3}{4}$ " in diameter. The internal flesh is white and, unlike salsify, the skin is black. Leaves are spiny, broad, and oblong, almost grass-like. In the second summer, plant tops develop edible yellow flowers. Scorzonera is also known as black salsify or Spanish salsify.

SITE SELECTION: For long, straight, consistent roots, scorzonera prefers a deep, friable, well-drained soil with a pH of 6.0 or above.

CULTURE: Sow in rows in early to midspring in a 2" band about 1" apart and $\frac{1}{2}$ " deep. Seeds require 2–3 weeks to germinate. During this time, do not allow the soil to dry out. After germination, thin seedlings to 2–3" apart; this will allow them to develop the best roots. Throughout the season, keep the crop free of weeds.

NOTE: Seedlings look like grass. Do not weed them out. To better identify seedlings outdoors, start a few seeds indoors.

DISEASE MANAGEMENT: Prevent disease with crop rotation and sanitation.

HARVEST: Begin harvesting scorzonera roots in the late fall. For the best flavor, wait to harvest until after several frosts have occurred. Dig the crop before the ground freezes. A portion of the crop

may be left in the ground for spring harvest, as scorzonera is cold hardy. Apply mulch or use a row cover in very cold regions for additional winter survival insurance.

STORAGE AND USES: Scorzonera may be overwintered in the ground like parsnips. When harvested, store in the refrigerator or root cellar at 32°F/0°C and 95% relative humidity. The flavor of the root of scorzonera is incomparable to any other fall or winter vegetable for soups and stews or for cooking alone. It continues to be used for medicinal purposes as a potent tonic. A member of the same family as sunflowers and asters, the flowers of the scorzonera plant may also serve ornamental purposes. While the plant is still young, tender leaves can be used as an ingredient in green salads.

Nutritional note: The root is rich in carbohydrates (18–20% by fresh weight), containing inulin and laevulin, which makes it a suitable part of a diabetic diet.