Parsley
More than just garnish
Stephanie Raymond

The Italians use it in sauces; the British make it into a jelly; and the Japanese serve it battered and fried. Cultivated around the globe for more than 2,000 years, parsley is one of the world's most popular herbs and also one of the healthiest.

Although parsley has been used for millennia in traditional medicine, today parsley is better known for its ability to decorate a plate than it is for its amazing health benefits.

"Parsley is packed full of nutrients that help ward off disease and promote good health."
A HEALTHY HERB
Often overlooked, parsley is packed full of nutrients that help ward off disease and promote good health.

Building strong bones
Just 1/4 cup (125 g) of parsley provides 300 percent of the recommended daily value of vitamin K, which is needed to process calcium and is essential for bone health. Diets high in vitamin K have been linked to greater bone density and a reduced risk of bone fractures in postmenopausal women who are prone to osteoporosis.

Parsley is also a good source of folic acid that keeps levels of the amino acid homocysteine in check. Elevated levels of homocysteine have been associated with an increased risk of bone fractures. In one study researchers found participants who had high amounts of homocysteine in their blood were nearly two times more likely to break a bone, regardless of bone density.

Promoting heart health
Parsley’s ability to lower homocysteine levels also makes it a heart-healthy food. Preliminary research has associated elevated homocysteine levels with heart disease and stroke, since too much of this amino acid can damage blood vessels.

Parsley may also be able to ward off diabetes-induced heart damage.
In Turkey parsley is regularly used to treat diabetes. Researchers there found that diabetic rats fed parsley for 28 days experienced lowered blood glucose levels and raised glutathione levels, an antioxidant that shields heart cells from damage.

Protecting against arthritis
Parsley is an excellent source of vitamin C. This immune-boosting vitamin not only wards off the common cold, but may also help prevent rheumatoid arthritis.

A study published in the *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases* found that participants whose diets were low in vitamin C were at three times greater risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis than those with a high vitamin C content in their diets.

Fighting cancer
Parsley is packed full of antioxidants including apigenin, a nutrient that may prove useful in cancer prevention. A study published in the *International Journal of Cancer* found women with a diet high in apigenin were 28 percent less likely to develop ovarian cancer than those who ate a diet low in this powerful antioxidant. Studies have also linked apigenin to a reduced risk of breast, skin, and prostate cancer.

FRESH PARSLEY
FOR YOUR KITCHEN
Grown year round, parsley is widely available at grocery stores and farmers’ markets.

When selecting parsley, look for deep green leaves that look crisp and fresh. Wilted and yellow leaves are a sign that it’s past its prime. If organic parsley is not available, you can easily grow your own.

Parsley can be grown both indoors or out, from seeds or seedlings. However, as parsley seeds can take up to four weeks to germinate, starting from a seedling is easier. For optimal growth, plant parsley in moist, well-drained soil in full sun. Parsley can be easily transplanted from an indoor pot to an outdoor garden, or vice versa.

To harvest, use kitchen scissors or gardening shears to cut off the outer stalks. Take care to cut the stalks close to the ground, as this encourages new growth.

Store fresh parsley in a plastic bag in the refrigerator or freezer. It will stay fresh up to two weeks in the refrigerator and last up to six months in the freezer.

In addition to its healthy benefits and fresh taste, parsley contains chlorophyll, which makes it a natural breath freshener. So enjoy this leafy herb that is so much more than just a pretty garnish.

Cilantro:
PARSLEY’S SPICY COUSIN
Although cilantro (also known as coriander or Chinese parsley) and flat-leaf parsley look similar, cilantro has its own nutritional merits and its own distinct taste. Parsley’s crisp, slightly bitter taste lends itself to Mediterranean dishes such as pesto and tabbouleh, whereas cilantro’s strong, spicy flavour works well in Asian and Mexican cuisine.

Cilantro is particularly high in immune-boosting vitamins A and C and is a good source of lutein and zeaxanthin, two antioxidants that may help prevent macular degeneration. It’s also full of fibre, important for lowering cholesterol.

Traditionally cilantro has been used to treat indigestion, heartburn, nausea, and stomach pain. In Iran it is used to treat anxiety and insomnia, and animal studies support this use. Cilantro leaves have been found to contain antibacterial compounds that can destroy salmonella.

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