

Cilantro *Coriandrum sativum*

Cilantro thrives in spring and fall, when the weather is cool and days are relatively short. Its leaves add a distinctive flavor to salsas, salads, and stir-fries. Leaves are best when eaten fresh; they lose much of their flavor when dried or frozen.

TIP – Cilantro, a member of the carrot family, has a taproot. For this reason, direct seeding is not just the best but the *only* option for growing it from seed. If you try to transplant seedlings they usually respond by promptly bolting.

Location and soil Cilantro grows best in full sun. In early summer, however, a spot that provides shade in the mid- to late afternoon may help delay bolting. Soil should be well drained and high in organic matter.

When to Plant Sow seed directly in the garden from early spring to early summer at 2-week intervals, and again in early fall. In regions where winters are frost-free, cilantro will thrive through much of the winter as well.

Seed Depth and Spacing Sprinkle seeds in a wide row so that they are about 1 inch apart, and cover with ½ inch of soil. Rows should be about 12 inches apart.

Germination Seedlings should appear in 7-10 days, although it may take longer in cold soil. Best germination occurs when soil temperature is between 60° and 75°F.

Thinning No thinning is necessary. A dense plant stand will help to shade out weed competition.

Care Water cilantro plants regularly, and mulch to control weeds and conserve soil moisture. Because plants respond to heat or drought stress by bolting it is important to provide them with even moisture.

Fertilize Mix compost into the soil at the time of planting.

Harvest You can begin selectively harvesting cilantro leaves when plants are about 6 inches tall. As they grow in size cilantro plants can be cut back more severely. When upright stalks form you can harvest whole plants, or allow them to produce attractive white flowers. Many gardeners grow cilantro for both the leaves and the seeds, which are known as coriander and used in curry powders.

Nutrition Cilantro leaves are a good source of Vitamins A, C, and K.



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Improved Variety: Slow Bolting

Slow-Bolt Cilantro was specifically bred for leaf, rather than coriander seed production, and is slower to bolt as summer days lengthen than other cultivated varieties. Plants grow to 2-3 feet in height, and are ready to harvest in about 45 days. When the weather gets consistently hot a stalk will form, followed by attractive flowers that are a magnet to beneficial insects, particularly the parasitic wasps and hoverflies that prey on aphids, caterpillars, and thrips.