

You Say Coriander, I Say Cilantro

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Did you know that all parts of the *Coriandrum sativum* are edible? But before we get into that, let's clarify something: cilantro is the leaf part of the plant and the fruit or seeds of the plant are known as coriander. *Coriandrum sativum* is a complex and sophisticated herb. An herb, a spice and a medicinal powerhouse, coriander is your friend.

Cultivated since the second millennium BC in Greece, *Coriandrum sativum* is an oft used annual herb that is native to Europe, N. Africa and parts of Asia. The plant is not particularly fond of hot weather (it bolts quickly), but it is added to a lot of hot foods. Much fancied in the culinary world, cilantro and coriander are found in the cuisines of the Middle East, Asia, the Mediterranean region, India, Latin American, Africa and less we forget the cuisine of Texas. It is also a vital ingredient in the monastic liqueur made by the Benedictine monks.

But, let's get back to the fact that all parts of the plant are edible. Yes they are. Beginning with the roots, yum! Coriander root is used in flavorings of Thai food, but it is not easily found in markets (all the more reason to grow the herb yourself). The leaves are used to flavor just about everything—soups, salads, salsas, you name it. Coriander, the seed, is particularly popular in Indian cuisine and used in curries. The flowers of the coriander plant are edible, and can be used in salads.

In folk medicine as well as in modern medical studies, coriander has a long list of benefits. Let's begin with life as an antioxidant. Antioxidants are found in both the leaves and the seed, but stronger in the leaves. Chemicals found in cilantro are known to have antibacterial qualities. Some cultures believe cilantro aids digestion, while others believe it relieves anxiety and sleep disorders.

Whether you are relieving anxiety in India, digestive disorders in the Middle East or simply adding flavor and spice to your curries, soups, salads and salsas, *Coriandrum sativum* is a true culinary friend with benefits, health benefits.