

Florida Food Fare

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Cilantro

Description: Cilantro, the leaf of the young coriander plant is one of the most popular seasonings and one of the most controversial. While there are those who can't imagine a Mexican or Middle Eastern dish without its tangy, citrusy flavor, there are others who describe the taste as "soapy". A member of the *Umbelliferae* family, which includes carrots and parsley, it is often referred to as Chinese Parsley. Its delicate, bright green leaves resemble those of flat leaf parsley. Although cilantro is most often associated with Mexican and Asian cuisine, it is believed to have originated in the Southern Mediterranean region. It is thought to be one of the first herbs to be used by mankind and one of the first spices to arrive in America.

Availability: Fresh Cilantro is available year round in the produce section of the supermarket. It is available dried, but is preferable fresh.

Nutritional Value: Unlike most herbs, cilantro is often used in large enough quantities that it could almost be considered a vegetable. One cup (46 g) contains 11 calories, 1.9 g carbohydrate, 1.2 g dietary fiber, 30 mg calcium and 234 mg potassium. It also yields 16.2 mg vitamin C, 28.5 mcg folate and 2819 IU vitamin A.

Selection and Care: Fresh Cilantro is usually sold in bunches in the supermarket with or without the roots. Choose leaves with fresh, bright, even color and no signs of wilting. Look for leafy plants with small stems and plenty of roots if possible. Not only are the roots delicious in cooking but the plant keeps

much longer with them attached. Set the cilantro in a bottle of water as you would a bouquet of flowers, then enclose the leaves tightly in a puffed out plastic bag. Refrigerated, fresh coriander will keep for a week or two this way. If the roots have been cut off, wrap the stems in damp toweling and put in a plastic bag. Just before using, wash and pat dry with paper towels.

Preparation and Use: Cilantro may be used whole or chopped. The whole plant, stems, leaves and roots are used in some cuisine. In India cilantro is used in generous amounts in fresh relishes, chutneys and salads. The Chinese steam fish with it and add it to stir fries and sauces. The leaves and roots add zest to most Thai curries and what would a spicy Mexican salsa be without a heaping portion of fresh cilantro. The leaves are usually stirred in during the last few minutes of preparation or added as a garnish. Stems and roots can be cooked longer.

Recipes:

Fresh Cilantro Salsa

2 cloves garlic	6 tomatoes, peeled, seeded, chopped or 2 cans
1 large onion, quartered	plum tomatoes, drained, chopped
1 green bell pepper, quartered, seeded	1 cup fresh cilantro
3 to 4 jalapeno peppers	Salt and pepper to taste

Place garlic in the bowl of a food processor and process until it is minced. Add the onion and peppers and process with on/off pulses until they are barely chopped. Add the tomatoes and cilantro and process until combined but slightly chunky. Add salt and pepper. Refrigerate until ready to use. Makes 2 1/2 cups.

Halibut with Cilantro and Lime

1 pound halibut	1/2 teaspoon oil
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice	1/2 cup sliced onion
1/4 cup low sodium soy sauce	2 cloves garlic minced
1 teaspoon cornstarch	1/4 cup coarsely chopped cilantro
1/2 teaspoon minced fresh ginger	

Cut fish into 1-inch pieces (tuna or swordfish steaks may be substituted for halibut). Sprinkle with lime juice. Blend soy sauce into cornstarch in cup until smooth, stir in ginger. Heat oil in wok or large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add onion and garlic and stir-fry for 2 minutes. Add halibut and stir fry 2 minutes

or until fish is opaque. Stir in soy sauce mixture. Let boil and thicken, stirring constantly. Sprinkle with cilantro. Serves 4

Indian Cilantro Chutney

1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger	3 tablespoons unsalted cashews
1/2 teaspoon to 1 teaspoon hot green chilies, minced	Juice of 2 lemons
1 heaping teaspoon sugar	1/2 teaspoon ground caraway seeds
	2 cups cilantro leaves

Place all ingredients except cilantro in a food processor. Blend, slowly add cilantro and continue blending. Adjust to taste by adding small amounts of any ingredient until desired flavor is desired. Let sit at least 2 hours or overnight.

Cilantro Rice

1 cup fresh cilantro	1 1/2 cups long-grain white rice
2 garlic cloves	1 teaspoon onion powder
1 fresh jalapeno pepper	1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
2 1/2 cups low sodium vegetable broth	1/3 cup grated carrot
2 teaspoons olive oil	

Mix in a blender cilantro, garlic, pepper and 1 cup broth until smooth. In a 3-quart pan over medium heat, stir oil, rice, onion powder, and cumin until rice is a pale golden color, 5-8 minutes. Stir in cilantro mixture, remaining broth and carrot. Cover, bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce and simmer until liquid is absorbed, about 20 minutes. Makes 5-6 servings.