

The Herb Society of America

Essential Facts for Stevia

Stevia rebaudiana 'AC G11A11' Crazy Sweet™



Stevia rebaudiana, leaves (not Crazy Sweet™)
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History

Stevia is nature's sweet secret. *Stevia rebaudiana* has been used in Japan for decades. In the early 1990s the United States banned stevia unless it was labeled as a supplement, however, in 2008 they approved rebaudioside A extract as a food additive. The herb has garnered attention with the rise in demand for low-carbohydrate, low-sugar food alternatives for treating obesity and high blood pressure.

Description

The genus *Stevia* consists of 240 species of plants which are native to South America, Central America, Mexico and the Orient; several species have been found as far north as Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

Family: Asteraceae (Compositae)

Latin Name: *Stevia rebaudiana*

Common Name: Stevia, candy leaf, sweet leaf, sugar leaf, sweet herb of Paraguay

Growth: Small perennial shrub with white flowers

Hardiness: To Zone 11, protect when nighttime temps. fall below 50° F/10°C

Light: Full sun, afternoon shade in hot climates

Soil: Well-drained, rich soil

Water: Average

Use: Culinary, medicinal

Propagation: Cuttings, seeds

The leaves of *S. rebaudiana* contain stevioside, one of the main glycosides responsible for the herb's sweet taste. Stevioside is much sweeter than sugar, but has no calories and is all natural. Crazy Sweet™ is high in rebaudioside A which gives it extra sweetness without a bitter aftertaste. The leaves are simple, opposite and have lateral veination which often runs nearly parallel to the mid-rib. Leaf margins are slightly serrate.

Culture

Stevia rebaudiana is best grown in sunny areas of the garden or in containers. Raised beds are the best choice for growing this herb if the soil is heavy or has a high clay content. Ideal soil would be a friable garden loam high in organic matter. Soil pH levels range from acid to slightly alkaline. Stevia is not a drought tolerant herb, the soil should be kept continuously moist, but not saturated.

Propagation

Crazy Sweet™ was developed by Jim Brandle, a breeder at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Canadian government's agriculture department. The focus of his work was to develop high rebaudioside A varieties, three of which Richters has licensed. One of these three became Crazy Sweet™ a Richter's exclusive which is trademarked with all



Stevia rebaudiana, flowers (not Crazy Sweet™)
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Uses

Stevia has been used for centuries as a medicinal herb/sweetener for “mate,” or hot herbal tea. The Japanese use this herb to sweeten meat dishes, desserts, beverages, and gum. The herb is native to Paraguay in South America and the Guarani Indians of that region also made use of it as a sweetener.



Stevia rebaudiana, dried leaves (not Crazy Sweet™)
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Harvesting and Drying

On a warm day, just prior to flowering, harvest four to six inches of the stems. These can be hung upside down in bunches for drying or spread out on screens in the sun or shade. Rapid drying methods are preferable to help preserve the stevioside content of the leaves. Properly dried leaves should be brittle to the touch and stored in containers to protect them from moisture.

Sources

Plant Information Online is a source with links to North American seed and nursery firms. It is a free service of the University of Minnesota Libraries.
<http://plantinfo.umn.edu>

Richter's Herbs
www.richters.com

Bibliography

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Tucker, Arthur O., and Thomas DeBaggio. *The Encyclopedia of Herbs: A Comprehensive Reference to Herbs of Flavor and Fragrance*. Portland, Oregon: Timber Press, 2009.



Stevia rebaudiana, young plant (not Crazy Sweet™)
Photo Wikimedia Commons

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