

Did You Know?



Mexican-Tarragon, *Tagetes lucida*

- Common names for *Tagetes lucida* include Mexican-tarragon, Mexican marigold, Mexican mint marigold, sweet mace, sweet-scented marigold, Texas tarragon and in Spanish, Pericón.
- Native to Mexico, south to Guatemala, *Tagetes lucida* is hardy to zone 8.
- The late summer to fall-blooming, small yellow composite flowers of *Tagetes lucida* grow best in full sun and well-drained soil.
- As some of the common names imply, Mexican-tarragon is often grown as a substitute for French tarragon which doesn't do well in hot, humid or rainy climates.
- The flavor of Mexican-Tarragon is similar to French tarragon but with a stronger intensity. Notes of anise and licorice dominate with hints of spice.
- Culinary uses include incorporating finely chopped leaves in egg dishes, soups, stews, sauces, and salad vinaigrettes. The flavor dissipates with prolonged heat, so it is best to add them towards the end of the cooking time.
- The edible flowers provide a bright yellow and anise-flavored garnish for salads and desserts. They can be added to soups, chicken and fish dishes, salad dressings. Traditionally, they are also added to rice and bean dishes, and egg and meat dishes.
- Additionally, the leaves and flowers are used in tea, as a natural dye resulting in yellow hues and as an insect repellent as a companion plant in the garden.
- *Tagetes lucida* had cultural significance and traditional uses historically in Mexico. It was known as Yauhtli in the language Nahuatl of the Aztecs, or by the Spanish term Pericón, "the plant that does it all".
- The flowers were added to the ground cocoa bean-based beverage, chocolatl, along with vanilla and chiles to make the spicy drink for the Aztec emperors and Mayan gods.
- They also used it in spiritual practices such as burning it as incense during ceremonies dedicated to the rain god Tlāloc, rubbing in on the chest as a safeguard for crossing a river, and as ceremonial decoration. It was also an ingredient in a medicinal powder used to calm or relieve the anxiety of victims about to be sacrificed.
- In traditional medicine, the whole plant has been used to heal gastrointestinal issues, including colic, and produce a calming effect. It is an anti-inflammatory and has analgesic properties. The flowers are used to make a tea to treat diarrhea, gas and respiratory conditions.
- Contact dermatitis or irritation may happen for some people as a result from contact with the sap of the plant. Washing with soap and water after contact is recommended.

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