

# Horseradish



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## QUICK FACTS

**Family:** Brassicaceae (Cruciferae)

**Latin Name:** *Armoracia rusticana*

**Growth:** herbaceous perennial

**Hardiness:** hardy to Zone 5

**Light:** full sun

**Soil:** well-drained, loose, garden loam or sandy, alluvial soil

**Water:** slightly moist, not too wet

**Pests/Diseases:** imported crucifer weevil, beet leafhopper; cabbageworms, turnip mosaic virus (TuMV), white rust, bacterial leafspot

**Propagation:** cuttings, crown division

**Use:** culinary

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## History and Origin



Horseradish originated in the southern part of Russia and the eastern part of the Ukraine (1). Ancient Greeks and Romans cultivated this herb for medicinal uses such as back pain and menstrual cramps (3). During the Middle Ages (c. 1000–1300) horseradish began to be incorporated into the Passover Seder as one of the *marror* or bitter herbs, to be used by the Jewish people. In the mid-1800s, immigrants living in northeastern Illinois planted horseradish with the intention of selling the roots on the commercial market. Today a large portion of horseradish is grown in areas surrounding Collinsville, Illinois. The town of Collinsville refers to itself as “the Horseradish Capital of the World.” Horseradish is also grown in other areas of the United States such as Pennsylvania, Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin, and California. Canada and Europe also cultivate the herb to sell commercially (2).

*Armoracia rusticana* Photo: commons.wikipedia.org

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### How do I cultivate horseradish?

During early spring, select a sunny location to plant horseradish roots in the garden. Choose the site carefully because this herb is a prolific grower and it can be invasive. Containers can be used if they are large enough for good root development and have adequate drainage. A well-drained, loose, garden loam works well for *Armoracia rusticana*. Work the soil deeply to a depth of ten to twelve inches. Water as needed to keep the plant slightly moist, but not overly wet.

### How is horseradish used?

*Armoracia rusticana* has been used for medicinal and culinary purposes. In the past, early physicians and healers would recommend horseradish for everything from a sore throat to digestive upset. The enzyme peroxidase (HRP) which is found in horseradish is a useful tool for detecting antibodies in the molecular biology field. Research is being conducted on the herb to explore the possibility that the compounds it holds may help prevent cancer. The most common culinary use for horseradish is to cut up the roots and mix them with vinegar, cream or mayonnaise to make horseradish sauce. The sauce can be paired with roast beef or prime rib. Try this herb with cheese, mustard, relish, eggs, beef, chicken, fish, shellfish, broccoli, tomatoes, beets, potatoes, squash and apples. A few herbs that pair nicely with horseradish are bay, mint, chives and garlic.

### How do I harvest and store horseradish?

The roots can be harvested as needed throughout the season. However, for peak flavor wait to harvest the roots until after the first killing frost. Store the roots in a cool, dark location to avoid spoilage and discoloration. They can be buried in a layer of moist sand (1) or placed in ventilated plastic bags in the refrigerator. Whole roots can be stored for up to three months using these methods. Outdoor trenches, pits, and root cellars can also be used for storage.

### References

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Virginia Crop Extension, *Specialty Profile: Horseradish*. [Cited October 12, 2010] Available from the World Wide Web <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/438/438-104/438-104.html>.

Voight, Charles E. Horseradish, *The Herbarist*, 70:66-72.

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