

Chicory Root and Powder Profile

Also known as

Cichorium intybus, Blue Sailors, Common Chicory, Wild Chicory, Succory, and Wild Succory.

Introduction

Chicory is a larger relative of the dandelion. Its large tap root has been used as a coffee substitute for generations, especially when coffee was unavailable. Chicory's leaves are used in salads and spring tonics in the same way as dandelion greens. It has been cultivated along the Nile in Egypt for thousands of years, and was used to assist with liver problems. Pliny the Elder wrote that chicory juice, when combined with rose oil and vinegar, was a good headache remedy. Charlemagne listed it as one of the herbs he required be grown in his garden. It was brought to North America from Europe in the 18th century, and is now established quite well here. Chicory can also be eaten as a food, and consumed as a beverage making it the number one coffee substitute. It is high in vitamin C, a powerful antioxidant, and has the highest concentration of inulin of any other plant that contains inulin.

Constituents

Up to one-third inulin (not to be confused with insulin)

Parts Used

Root and leaves, dried. The root is usually granulated and roasted for a near precise coffee like flavor.

Typical Preparations

Teas, and heated beverages very rarely used in capsule form.

Summary

Chicory is nutritionally important for what it does rather than what it contains. It contains a special class of carbohydrates known as fructans, a group containing inulin (not to be confused with insulin) and oligofructoses. These carbohydrates feed the symbiotic bacteria living in the intestine rather than the human body itself. They allow the healthy bacteria in the colon to produce short chain fatty acids that help prevent colon cancer, but they do not serve as a food source of pathogenic bacteria. The bacterial fermentation of fructans in the intestine changes its chemistry so that the human body absorbs calcium and magnesium much more readily from other foods, so much so that consuming endive and similar vegetables demonstrably builds stronger bones. These complex sugars also lower cholesterol and triglycerides.

Precautions

Avoid excessive consumption if you have gallstones.

Botanical: Cichorium intybus (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Compositae

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---Synonyms---Succory. Wild Succory. Hendibeh. Barbe de Capucin.

---Part Used---Root.

---Habitat---Wild Chicory or Succory is not uncommon in many parts of England and Ireland, though by no means a common plant in Scotland. It is more common on gravel or chalk, especially on the downs of the south-east coast, and in places where the soil is of a light and sandy nature, when it is freely to be found on waste land, open borders of fields and by the roadside, and is easily recognized by its tough, twig-like stems, along which are ranged large, bright blue flowers about the size and shape of the Dandelion. Sir Jas. E. Smith, founder of the Linnean Society, says of the tough stems: 'From the earliest period of my recollection, when I can just remember tugging ineffectually with all my infant strength at the tough stalks of the wild Succory, on the chalky hills about Norwich....'

---Description---It is a perennial, with a tap root like the Dandelion. The stems are 2 to 3 feet high, the lateral branches numerous and spreading, given off at a very considerable angle from the central stem, so that the general effect of the plant, though spreading, is not rich and full, as the branches stretch out some distance in each direction and are but sparsely clothed with leaves of any considerable size. The general aspect of the plant is somewhat stiff and angular.

The lower leaves of the plant are large and spreading - thickly covered with hairs, something like the form of the Dandelion leaf, except that the numerous lateral segments or lobes are in general direction about at a right angle with the central stem, instead of pointing downwards, as in similar portions of the leaf of the Dandelion. The terminal lobe is larger and all the segments are coarsely toothed. The upper leaves are very much smaller and less divided, their bases clasping the stems.

The flowerheads are numerous, placed in the axils of the stem-leaves, generally in clusters of two or three. When fully expanded, the blooms are rather large and of a delicate tint of blue: the colour is said to specially appeal to the humble bee. They are in blossom from July to September. However sunny the day, by the early afternoon every bloom is closed, its petal-rays drawing together. Linnaeus used the Chicory as one of the flowers in his floral Clock at Upsala, because of its regularity in opening at 5 a.m. and closing at 10 a.m. in that latitude. Here it closes about noon and opens between 6 and 7 in the morning.

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---History---It has been suggested that the name *Succory* came from the Latin *succurrere* (to run under), because of the depth to which the root penetrates. It may, however be a corruption of Chicory, or *Ctchorium*, a word of Egyptian origin, which in various forms is the name of the plant in practically every European language. The Arabian physicians called it 'Chicourey.' *Intybus*, the specific name of the Chicory, is a modification of another Eastern name for the plant - *Hendibeh*. The Endive, an allied but foreign species (a native of southern Asia and northern provinces of China) derives both its common and specific names from the same word. The Endive and the Succory are the only two species in the genus *Cichorium*. There is little doubt that the *Cichorium* mentioned by Theophrastus as in use amongst the ancients was the wild Chicory, since the names by which the wild plant is known in all the languages of modern Europe are merely corruptions of the original Greek word, while there are different names in the different countries for the Garden Endive.

Succory was known to the Romans and eaten by them as a vegetable or in salads, its use in this way being mentioned by Horace, Virgil, Ovid, and Pliny.

On the Continent, Chicory is much cultivated, not only as a salad and vegetable, but also for fodder and more especially for the sake of its root, which though woody in the wild state, under cultivation becomes large and fleshy, with a thick rind, and is employed extensively when roasted and ground, for blending with coffee.

In this country Chicory has been little grown. There was an attempt in 1788 to introduce its cultivation here as fodder, it being grown largely for that purpose in France, especially for sheep, but it would seem not to have met with success and has not been grown as a farm crop, though it furnishes abundance of good fodder at a time when green food is scarce, growing very quickly, two cuttings being possible in the first year and three in subsequent years, the produce being said to be superior on the whole to Lucerne. Although this plant, being succulent, seldom dries well for hay in this country, it seems valuable as fresh food for horses, cows and sheep: rabbits are fond of it. There has been an attempt since the war to re-introduce the cultivation of Chicory, and it has been successfully grown at the experimental farm of the University College of North Wales at Bangor, and at Kirton, Lincolnshire, for the first time for forty years, was reported in March, 1917, to be yielding 20 tons per acre.

When grown for a forage crop, it should be sown during the last week in May, or first week in June, in drills about 15 inches apart, the plants being afterwards singled to from 6 inches to 8 inches in the row. About 5 lb. of seed will be needed for the acre. If sown too early the plant is likely to bolt. So grown, the crop of leaves can be cut in autumn to be fed to stock of all kinds, such as poultry, rabbits, cows, etc., and in following years, if the crop is kept clean, the foliage may be mown off three or four times. So grown it should of course never be allowed to seed.

On the Continent, especially in Belgium, the young and tender roots are boiled and eaten with butter like parsnips, and form a very palatable vegetable.

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---Uses---The leaves are used in salads, for which they are much superior to Dandelion. They may be cut and used from young plants, but are generally blanched, as the unblanched leaves are bitter. This forced foliage is termed by the French *Barbe de Capucin* and forms a favourite winter salad, much eaten in France and Belgium. A particularly fine strain is known as *Witloof*, in Belgium, where smallholders make a great feature of this crop and excel in its cultivation. The young blanched heads also form a good vegetable for cooking, similar to Sea Kale.

Enormous quantities of the plant are cultivated on the Continent, to supply the grocer with the ground

Chicory which forms an ingredient or adulteration to coffee. In Belgium, Chicory is sometimes even used as a drink without admixture of coffee. For this purpose, the thick cultivated root is sliced kiln-dried, roasted and then ground. It differs from coffee in the absence of volatile oil, rich aromatic flavour, caffeine and caffeotannic acid, and in the presence of a large amount of ash, including silica. When roasted, it yields 45 to 65 per cent of soluble extractive matter. Roasted Coffee yields only 21 to 25 per cent of soluble extract, this difference affording a means of approximately determining the amount of Chicory in a mixture.

When infused, Chicory gives to coffee a bitterish taste and a dark colour. French writers say it is *contra-stimulante*, and serves to correct the excitation caused by the principles of coffee, and that it suits bilious subjects who suffer from habitual constipation, but is ill-adapted for persons whose vital energy soon flags, and that for lymphatic or bloodless persons its use should be avoided.

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---Cultivation---Chicory is a hardy perennial and will grow in almost any soil. For use as a salad, the plant may be easily cultivated in the kitchen garden. Sow the seed in May or June, in drills about 1 inch deep, about 12 inches apart, and thin out the young plants to 6 or 8 inches apart in the rows; when well up, water in very dry weather.

For blanching, dig up in October as many as may be needed, and after cutting off the leaves, it is well to let the roots be exposed to the air for a fortnight or three weeks; they should then be planted in deep boxes or pots of sand or light soil, leaving 8 inches between the soil and the top of the box. A cover of some sort is put on the box to exclude the light and the box put into a warm place, either in a warm green-house, under the stage, or, being so hardy, they may be successful in a moderately warm cellar and shed from which frost is excluded. Deprived of light, the young oncoming leaves become blanched and greatly elongated, and in this state are cut and sent to the market. If light is totally debarred, as it should be, the produce will be of a beautiful creamy white colour, soft and nearly destitute of the bitter flavour present when the plants are grown in the open air.

The fresh root is bitter, with a milky juice which is somewhat aperient and slightly sedative, suiting subjects troubled with bilious torpor, whilst, on good authority, the plant has been pronounced useful against pulmonary consumption.

A decoction of 1 OZ. of the root to a pint of boiling water, taken freely, has been found effective in jaundice, liver enlargements, gout and rheumatic complaints, and a decoction of the plant, fresh gathered, has been recommended for gravel.

Syrup of Succory is an excellent laxative for children, as it acts without irritation.

An infusion of the herb is useful for skin eruptions connected with gout.

The old herbalists considered that the leaves when bruised made a good poultice for swellings, inflammations and inflamed eyes, and that 'when boiled in broth for those that have hot, weak and feeble stomachs doe strengthen the same.' Tusser (1573) considered it - together with Endive - a useful remedy for ague, and Parkinson pronounced Succory to be a 'fine, cleansing, jovial plant.'

Chicory when taken too habitually, or freely, causes venous passive congestion in the digestive organs within the abdomen and a fullness of blood in the head. If used in excess as a medicine it is said to bring about loss of visual power in the retina.

From the flowers a water was distilled to allay inflammation of the eyes. With violets, they were used to make the confection, 'Violet plates,' in the days of Charles II.

The seeds contain abundantly a demulcent oil, whilst the petals furnish a glucoside which is colourless unless treated with alkalies, when it becomes of a golden yellow. The leaves have been used to dye blue.

SWINE'S CHICORY (*Arnoseric pusilla*, Gaertn.), also known as Lamb's Succory, is a cornfield weed belonging to a closely related genus. All its leaves are radical, and it has small heads of yellow flowers on leafless, branched flower-stalks. It has no therapeutic uses.

To obtain roots of a large size, the ground must be rich, light and well manured.

---Part Used Medicinally---The root. When dried - in the same manner as Dandelion it is brownish, with tough, loose, reticulated white layers surrounding a radiate, woody column. It often occurs in commerce crowned with remains of the stem. It is inodorous and of a mucilaginous and bitter taste.

---Constituents---A special bitter principle, not named, insulin and sugar.

---Medicinal Action and Uses---Chicory has properties similar to those of Dandelion, its action being tonic, laxative and diuretic.