

# Coriander Seed Profile

## Also known as

Coriandrum sativum, Chinese Parsley, Cilantro, Coriandri Fructus, Dhanyaka, Koriander, Kustumburi.

## Introduction

Coriander is the seed of the herb most Americans know as cilantro. It is native to Europe and Western Asia, but it has been naturalized and widely cultivated in North America. References to coriander can be found in Sanskrit writings as far back as 5000 B.C.E., and the seeds were found in Egyptian tombs as far back as the 21st Dynasty. Dioscides believed that ingesting it could heighten a man's sexual potency. In fact, many cultures believed it to be an aphrodisiac, and it was a main component in love potions up through the Renaissance. Coriander seed has been used to settle upset stomach in herbal traditions around the world, it is often combined with cardamom, caraway, fennel, and/or anise. Traditional Chinese medicine used the seeds, usually in the form of a infusion, as an aromatic carminative, and used as decoction and gargle for toothaches.

## Constituents

Anethole, camphor, linalool, pinene, quercetin, rutin.

## Parts Used

The dried seed.

## Typical Preparations

Infusion or tincture, and it may be incorporated into food dishes.

## Summary

The Chinese thought that anyone who consumes coriander over their lives would be rewarded with immortality. Nowadays, coriander is used as a flavoring agent in pharmaceuticals, alcohol (vermouth, bitters, and gin), frozen dairy deserts, candy, baked goods, gelatins, and various meat products. Medicinally, coriander seed is best suited for relief of tension in the upper abdomen, such as flatulence, cramps, and bloating.

## Precautions

None.

**Botanical: Coriandrum sativum (LINN.)**

**Family: N.O. Umbelliferae**

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**---Parts Used---**Fruit and fresh leaves.

**---Habitat---**Coriander, an umbelliferous plant indigenous to southern Europe, is found occasionally in Britain in fields and waste places, and by the sides of rivers. It is frequently found in a semi-wild state in the east of England, having escaped from cultivation.

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**---Description---**It is an annual, with erect stems, 1 to 3 feet high, slender and branched. The lowest leaves are stalked and pinnate, the leaflets roundish or oval, slightly lobed. The segments of the uppermost leaves are linear and more divided. The flowers are in shortly-stalked umbels, five to ten rays, pale mauve, almost white, delicately pretty. The seed clusters are very symmetrical and the seeds fall as soon as ripe. The plant is bright green, shining, glabrous and intensely foetid.

Gerard described it as follows:

'The common kind of Coriander is a very striking herb, it has a round stalk full of branches, two feet long. The leaves are almost like the leaves of the parsley, but later on become more jagged, almost like the leaves of Fumitorie, but a great deal smaller and tenderer. The flowers are white and grow in round tassels like Dill.'

The inhabitants of Peru are so fond of the taste and smell of this herb that it enters into almost all their dishes, and the taste is often objectionable to any but a native. Both in Peru and in Egypt, the leaves are put into soup.

The seeds are quite round like tiny balls. They lose their disagreeable scent on drying and become fragrant- the longer they are kept, the more fragrant they become.

Coriander was originally introduced from the East, being one of the herbs brought to Britain by the Romans. As an aromatic stimulant and spice, it has been cultivated and used from very ancient times. It was employed by Hippocrates and other Greek physicians.

The name Coriandrum, used by Pliny, is derived from *koros*, (a bug), in reference to the foetid smell of the leaves.

Pliny tells us that 'the best (Coriander) came from Egypt,' and from thence no doubt the Israelites gained their knowledge of its properties.

The Africans are said to have called this herb by a similar name (*goid*), which Gesenius derives from a verb (*gadad*), signifying 'to cut,' in allusion to the furrowed appearance of the fruit.

It is still much used in the East as a condiment, and forms an ingredient in curry powder.

In the northern countries of Europe, the seeds are sometimes mixed with bread, but the chief consumption of Coriander seed in this country is in flavouring certain alcoholic liquors, for which purpose it is largely grown in Essex. Distillers of gin make use of it, and veterinary surgeons employ it as a drug for cattle and horses. The fruit is the only part of the plant that seems to have any medical or dietetical reputation.

Confectioners form from the seeds little, round pink and white comfits for children.

It is included in the British Pharmacopoeia, but it is chiefly used to disguise unpleasant medicine.

A power of conferring immortality is thought by the Chinese to be a property of the seeds.

Turner says (1551): "Coriandre layd to wyth breade or barley mele is good for Saynt Antonyes fyre" (the erysipelas: so called because it was supposed to have been cured by the intercession of St. Anthony).

Coriander cakes are seldom made now.'

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**---Cultivation---**Coriander likes a warm, dry, light soil, though it also does well in the somewhat heavy soil of Essex.

Sow in mild, dry weather in April, in shallow drills, about 1/2 inch deep and 8 or 9 inches apart, and cover it evenly with the soil. The seeds are slow in germinating. The seeds may also be sown in March, in heat, for planting out in May.

As the seeds ripen, about August, the disagreeable odour gives place to a pleasant aroma, and the plant is then cut down with sickles and when dry the fruit is threshed out.

The best land yields on an average 15 cwt. per acre. It is grown to a small extent in the Eastern counties, but more especially in Essex. It is also cultivated in various parts of Continental Europe, and in northern Africa, Malta and India.

**---Parts Used---**The fruit, and sometimes for salads and soups - the fresh leaves.

The fruit (so-called seeds) are of globular form, beaked, finely ribbed, yellowish-brown 1/5 inch in diameter, with five longitudinal ridges, separable into two halves (the mericarps), each of which is concave internally and shows two broad, longitudinal oil cells (vittae). The seeds have an aromatic taste and, when crushed, a characteristic odour.

**---Constituents---**Coriander fruit contains about 1 per cent of volatile oil, which is the active ingredient. It is pale yellow or colourless, and has the odour of Coriander and a mild aromatic taste. The fruit yields about 5 per cent of ash and contains also malic acid, tannin and some fatty matter.

Coriander fruit of the British Pharmacopoeia is directed to be obtained from plants cultivated in Britain, the fruit before being submitted to distillation being brushed or bruised.

The English-grown are said to have the finest flavour, though the Russian and German are the richest in oil. The Mogadore are the largest and brightest, but contain less oil, and the Bombay fruit, which are also large, are distinguished by their oval shape and yield the least oil of any.

**---Medicinal Action and Uses---**Stimulant, aromatic and carminative. The powdered fruit, fluid extract and oil are chiefly used medicinally as flavouring to disguise the taste of active purgatives and correct their griping tendencies. It is an ingredient of the following compound preparations of the Pharmacopoeia: confection, syrup and tincture of senna, and tincture and syrup of Rhubarb, and enters also into compounds with angelica gentian, jalap, quassia and lavender. As a corrigent to senna, it is

considered superior to other aromatics.

If used too freely the seeds become narcotic.

Coriander water was formerly much esteemed as a carminative for windy colic.

**---Preparations---** Powdered fruit: dose, 10 to 60 grains. Fluid extract, 5 to 30 drops. B.P.: dose, 1/2 to 3 drops.

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## **RECIPE**

### **'Lucknow' Curry Powder**

1 OZ. ginger, 1 OZ. Coriander seed, 1 OZ. cardamum seed, 1/4 oz. best Cayenne powder, 3 oz. turmeric.

Have the best ingredients powdered at the druggist's into a fine powder and sent home in different papers. Mix them *well before the fire*, then put the mixture into a widemouthed bottle, cork well, and keep it in a dry place. - (From an old Family Cookerybook in the author's possession.)