

Celebrate the versatile herb of year — cilantro coriander



Cilantro leaves add a pop of green to a plate of aloo gobi flavored with coriander at Marigold Maison in Lincolnshire. (Sunil Kumar)

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While planting your garden, consider cilantro coriander. The coriander seeds of the cilantro plant are being honored as the International Herb Association's Herb of the Year for 2017.

You can use the cilantro leaves now and save the seeds, the coriander, for savory, comforting meals next winter. "It's the plant that gives all year," said Jennifer Brennan, Horticulture Information Specialist and Manager of Education at Chalet Nursery and Garden Center in Wilmette. "Cilantro is also wonderful for attracting pollinators to your garden," she said.

Brennan recommended growing cilantro in separate containers to help prevent seed dropping and germination that can easily happen. She said cilantro likes full sun and plenty of water, but not too much. "Cilantro likes a lot of water, but needs to get a little dry in between waterings." With herbs, she suggested avoiding fertilizer, because it can inhibit the natural oils that give herbs their distinct flavors.

From meat rubs to comfort cuisine to craft beers, coriander earns its keep.

When ground, coriander can make an excellent rub for grilling or roasting meats. "When you toast coriander and grind it, it becomes floral with a touch of tartness. For a pork chop rub, I like to combine coriander with fennel and then add some pimento, a little brown sugar and salt; it makes for a really good rub," said [Sarah Grueneberg](#), chef/partner at Monteverde in Chicago. Along with [Rick Bayless](#), Grueneberg was one of only two chefs in the Chicago area to win a James Beard Award earlier this month. She won the Best Chef Great Lakes award.

Coriander is also great with heartier seafoods. "Coriander is a fruitier spice, and with succulent, meatier seafoods you can really taste why the spice is so special," Monteverde Owner Meg Sahs said.

Coriander sparks soft notes of flavor in Chef Monika Tantichula's coriander crispy shredded beef brisket at NaKorn in Evanston. "We roast the coriander seeds, and then pound them so the intense aroma will release when the coriander cooks," Tantichula said. "In Thai cooking there are five taste sensations (sweet, sour, bitter, salt and spice), and a genuine Thai dish will combine at least three of those five so that the nuance of each can be tasted."

At Marigold Maison in Lincolnshire, Chef Sunil Kumar uses coriander in his cauliflower dish, aloo gobi. It's bursting with the flavors of Indian spices, and all of them mild yet satisfying. "Because coriander has such a mild flavor, it pairs well with the many spices we use in the aloo gobi," Kumar said.

Kumar explained that a key to working with coriander is to bring the ingredient in just before serving a dish. "When coriander is added to hot dishes, it browns quickly, and impacts the flavor and beauty of the ingredient."

Technique is essential when working with coriander. The way the seeds are treated can make a difference. Chef Alex Guarnaschelli said she likes to "bloom" coriander seeds, heating them in oil over medium heat. She said then she tosses them in shrimp or asparagus. The blooming technique involves getting the seeds hot, but not smoking. Cook the seeds until they become fragrant. Guarnaschelli is busy getting ready to co-host the Taste of the Upper West Side

Summer in the City: Surf & Turf" program on May 19 in New York City. "It's such a fun night," she said. She said she also loves coriander seeds in spice rubs for meats and fish. She said they're also great in rice pilaf.

Too busy to plant? There are plenty of places to shop for cilantro.

Rare Tea Cellars in Chicago sells coriander from India. "It's got a little lemon aroma to it," said Master Tea Blender and President/ CEO Rodrick Markus. "I absolutely love coriander." He also carries a flattened coriander from India. "They take green coriander, hit it with a pan, and pan-fire it," Markus said. "It's crunchy and amazing."

At The Spice House, which has locations in Evanston, Geneva, Chicago and Milwaukee, spice masters grind coriander seed about once every 10 days. "There is really no more lovely smell," said co-owner Patty Erd.

"Something about it is like a refreshing spring day."

Erd said coriander is one of the most universal spices; it has the ability to blend with everything. "I guess you could say it is a very synergistic spice," she said. "Coriander provides a more complex flavor profile of sweet, citrusy and bitter, which works wonderfully for craft beers such as Belgian witbier." Erd said she is selling more and more coriander as craft beer increases.

Brew Master Brandon Boshers makes a Meridian Wit at Half Day Brewing Company in Lincolnshire. "A generous amount of coriander gives the Meridian Wit a peppery citrus aroma and a crisp taste shines through," he said.

"Coriander pairs well with the slight floral and mostly citrus aroma and flavor," said Peter Janusas, head brewer at Wild Onion Brewery in Lake Barrington. Coriander is a key ingredient in Wild Onion Brewery's Wheat Stacker Belgian Wit. The coriander is used in the boiling process very close to the end. "This extrapolates the greatest aroma and flavor potential of this powerful little seed," Janusas said. "Overall, our interpretation of the style definitely sings the notes of floral and citrus that coriander loves to sing." Janusas said the Wheat Stacker Belgian Wit will also be available at a second location Wild Onion Tied House, which is scheduled to open in Oak Park this summer.

To learn more about the International Herb Association and the Herb of the Year program, visit www.iHerb.org.

Aloo Gohbi

½ cup olive oil

2 teaspoons cumin seeds

2 teaspoons mustard seeds

2 cups fresh onions, diced into ¼-inch pieces

1 tablespoon fresh ginger, minced

1 tablespoon fresh garlic, minced

1 cup tomato puree

1 teaspoon coriander powder

1 teaspoon turmeric powder

1 teaspoon garam masala

1 teaspoon black pepper powder

1 tablespoon kosher salt

1 pound fresh potato, cut into ¾-inch pieces

2 cups water

2 pounds fresh cauliflower flowerets, cut into ¾-inch pieces

Heat oil in heavy bottom pan. Add cumin and mustard seeds and cook until golden brown.

Add diced onions and cook for 2 to 3 minutes; add ginger and garlic and cook for 1 to 3 minutes.

Add tomato puree, all the spices, potatoes, 1 cup water and cover the pot. Cook for 7 to 10 minutes.

Add cauliflower, and stir to coat cauliflower with spices Add 1 cup water. Cover the cauliflower for 8 to 12 minutes.

Remove the cover from cauliflower, stir gently.

Remove cauliflower from heat and transfer to a serving container. Serve with rice or roti.

Executive Chef Sunil Kumar, Marigold Maison

Coriander Crispy Shredded Beef Brisket

Crispy brisket:

2 pounds beef brisket, fat-trimmed

8 cups water

1 tablespoon sea salt

In a large stockpot, bring water and salt to a boil.

Add brisket; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer until tender. Remove the brisket, let it cool. Shred the meat and set aside.

Crispy shallot:

½ cup vegetable oil

5 Thai shallots, thinly sliced

Heat oil in a large sauce pan till hot.

Add thinly sliced shallots, fry until golden brown. Remove from heat and set aside.

Reserve about 1 tablespoon of the frying oil.

Sauce:

1 teaspoon coriander seed, roasted and lightly smashed

1/2 teaspoon black pepper, ground

1/2 cup granulated sugar

1 tablespoon thin soy sauce

1/4 cup water

1 pinch of salt

In medium pot over medium-low heat, combine all the ingredients, and cook over until thickened.

Assembly:

In a large sauce pan, heat the reserved 1 tablespoon frying oil over medium-high heat until hot. Lower the heat to medium-low, add shredded brisket and fry until crispy, with shallots. Stir in the sauce and mix well.

Chef Monika Tantichula, NaKorn

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