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Contributed by Lin Moeller

PARSLEY—BENEFICIAL, HEALTHFUL, MEDICINAL PLANT



As gardeners and ‘chefs,’ we all most likely have at least one herb in our gardens, in amongst perennials, in a designated herb or vegetable garden, or in a container on the patio. One of my favorites is **parsley**, which is a stand-out for the properties noted in this title and for habitat importance.

Parsley, *Petroselinum*, originated in the Mediterranean region where it has been cultivated for over 2000 years and is symbolically used in the Passover celebration today. Nutritionally, parsley has high levels of vitamin A, C, and K. It has proved to help maintain the health of a number of our organs and to be an antioxidant, an analgesic and have antibacterial properties. As a calmative, a sprig of parsley decoratively

placed on our entrée when dining out is perfect to nibble at the end of dinner to guard against digestive concerns and also cleanse the breath.

As a culinary herb, the aromatic leaves are very versatile for flavor and garnish in soups, salads, sauces, dressings, side dishes, etc. Parsley is a biennial that will grow in full sun or partial shade. It does best in moist, well drained, fertile soil. The heat of the summer and dry periods will cause it to bolt to over two feet in height, flower and seed prematurely. The seeds take up to a month to germinate, therefore in the spring parsley seeds should be planted early, about the same time as peas.

In my garden I always make sure I have enough to use in cooking and to share. That which I share, I also let flower and seed, eventually falling upon the soil below. The seeds will germinate towards autumn and in a slightly protected spot will winter over as the next year’s crop. My sharing is with the caterpillars of the black swallowtail butterfly. I have found them after feeding, on the nearby fence pickets where they have crawled to form their chrysalis



Parsley and dill as members of the carrot family, emit chemicals from the leaves that are found in the swallowtail’s native host plant. The swallowtail smells the chemical, lays eggs on the leaves and the cycle continues on this ‘adopted’ host plant, an important part of their habitat.

If you have a lot of parsley or other herbs, they can easily be dried in the microwave by spreading them out on a paper towel and setting the timer on high for 45 to 60 seconds. The result will be crispy, green herbs that can be stored in a plastic bag or container in the freezer to maintain freshness.

Along with all the benefits noted above, one final reason for growing parsley in our gardens this next year is that the International Herb Association has selected it as the ‘Herb of the Year for 2021.’ A healthful Bon Appetit!

Happy Thanksgiving from TCGC’s Horticulture Committee