

## PARSLEY

*(Petroselinum crispum)*

by Master Gardener Jennifer Dornbush



*Italian flat-leafed parsley, with permission, S. Wrightson*

Parsley is a hardy biennial grown as an annual. It is a member of the carrot family (Apiaceae) and is a versatile herb used in cooking or as a garnish. There are two varieties of parsley grown for their leaves: curly-leafed French parsley and flat-leafed Italian parsley. Curly-leafed parsley grows to a height of 6 to 18 inches tall and wide. Its deeply ruffled leaves gives it a handsome appearance and it is often used as a culinary garnish. The flat-leafed Italian parsley grows to a height of 1-1/2 to 3 feet tall by 2 feet wide. This variety is considered to be more flavorful than the curly-leafed parsley and is often preferred for cooking, although either variety can be used for cooking.

Parsley is a cool weather herb and prefers a little shade in a hot, summer garden. It can be grown either from seeds or starts. The seeds are slow to germinate so soaking them overnight is recommended. Even then, it will take 10 to 28 days for the seeds

to germinate depending on the variety. It is best to read the seed package for days to germination information and always keep good notes. In Sonoma County seeds can be sown from March

through May and August through October. Plant the seeds 1/4-inch deep, keep them evenly moist and be patient. You can also buy plant starts from your local nursery or start them indoors 6 weeks before the last frost date.

Parsley is not used in large quantities so two or three plants will supply a family's needs. Plants will survive over the winter in most of Sonoma County if protected from a hard freeze. A few plants started in spring will last all winter. Parsley grows best in moist, fertile soil. Top the bed with compost before planting and, usually, no additional feeding is needed. Cover the soil with mulch to help keep it evenly moist. Parsley can easily be grown in containers or mixed into an ornamental flower bed.

You can start harvesting parsley between 60 and 75 days after planting. Harvest sprigs of parsley from the outside of the plant. Cut only 2 or 3 sprigs from each individual plant at one time to keep it vigorously growing. Fresh cut sprigs can be kept in the refrigerator crisper for a week or more. Extra parsley can be frozen or dried for longer term storage.

In spring when the days start to get longer and the temperatures start to warm the over-wintered plants will start to bolt. Bolting is when a plant shifts its energy from growing leaves to growing taller and starting to bloom. When this happens it is time to remove the year old plants and replace them with a new crop. But, before you remove them harvest some of the parsley sprigs to last you until the new crop is ready to harvest.



*Parsley umbil (flower) and leaves, GNU Free Doc Lic 2.1, photo Jonathunder*