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How To Grow Coriander

Growing coriander is just as easy as growing cilantro. No wonder, it's the same plant...

Coriander or Cilantro? What is Coriander?

It's simple: the name cilantro refers to the leaves and the name coriander to the seeds. Some countries call both coriander, so coriander leaf is nothing else but cilantro.

Coriander is a pretty annual herb with feathery leaves and white umbrella type flowers. The small, ball shaped seeds are widely used to spice up Asian curries, soups and stews.

The fresh coriander leaf is also used for salads, soups and curries, and it tastes totally different from the seed.

Why coriander flowers are important

When coriander plants get stressed, or in hot weather, or once they reach a certain age, they stop making leaves and instead start developing a tall flower stalk. People who grow coriander mainly for the leaf sometimes cut this stalk out, in the hope of getting more leaves. I suggest you let your coriander grow flowers, even if you are not interested in the seeds.

There is a good reason. Coriander flowers belong in the *Umbelliferae* family. (Parsely, dill and carrots for example are in the same family).

Coriander flowers are an important food source for beneficial insects, especially little parasitic wasps and predatory flies. So to attract many beneficial insects you want lots and lots of coriander flowers in your garden.

And you want those coriander plants not only in a neat row in one bed, you want plants sprinkled through your other vegetables and under your fruit trees and in any other place you can fit them.

Coriander is not very greedy or competitive, the feathery leaves don't make too much shade, so **there is no reason not to have coriander plants growing all through your garden!**

Growing coriander seed

If you want to **grow coriander for seeds** you don't need to worry so much over your plants bolting to seed prematurely. However, a coriander plant will of course produce more and better seed if it is big and strong. So it doesn't hurt to still observe all the advice from the previous page to let the coriander grow as big and strong as possible first.

Keep watering and feeding your coriander plants well, and wait for the flower to develop and set seeds. In hot weather this may take as little as 4 - 6 weeks from sowing, during cool weather it can take several months.

How To Grow Cilantro From Seeds

How to grow cilantro

Cilantro needs a frost free period to grow but it doesn't like extreme heat. So in milder climates you grow cilantro during summer, in tropical climates you grow it during the cooler dry season.

To grow cilantro you need reasonable soil and you need to keep the plants well watered.

Always grow cilantro from seed, directly where you want it. Cilantro HATES being transplanted. The stress will likely cause it to go straight to seed and then it dies. And you never get any leaves at all!

Also, cilantro grows a big taproot, and those little seedling pots are not deep enough to accommodate it. **Growing cilantro in a pot isn't doing it any good.**

Don't bother buying cilantro from a nursery in a pot. Just get the seed.

Growing cilantro from seed

The standard directions are to sow cilantro about 1 cm deep, but there is no need to get scientific about it. Just cover the seeds and keep them moist.

You can **plant cilantro in rows** for easy harvesting or you can spread the seed over a wider area and rake it in. It depends how much seed you have available. (If you have lots of seed there is another way to grow cilantro and I'll tell you about it below.)

Don't go overboard with the amount of seed. Healthy cilantro plants grow fairly big, about 50 cm or 2 feet tall.

You want **about 5 cm between plants if you grow cilantro for the leaf**. They need more space if you grow them for seed, but you can always eat the extra plants and just leave a few to go to seed.

Cilantro seeds take about two to three weeks to germinate. If they come up too thickly, just pull up and eat the extras...

Yes, the best way to harvest surplus plants is to pull them up. (Provided you can do so without damaging the plants next to it.) Cilantro grows a taproot that is packed with flavour. You will often see Asian soup stock recipes (they call it Chinese parsley) call for cilantro or coriander root, just like Europeans use parsley root in stock.

Harvesting cilantro

After you have eaten all your thinnings, harvest individual cilantro leaves of the base of the remaining plants. Just make sure the plant is big enough to cope and leave some leaves on it so it can continue to grow.

Sooner or later your cilantro plants will flower. Once they start developing that flower stalk they stop making more leaves. Therefore it is a good idea to **re-sow cilantro every few weeks during the growing season**. That way you never run out.

Some people also chop out the flower stalk as soon as it shows and manage to keep the plants going a bit longer. Or they harvest the whole cilantro plant once it shows signs of wanting to flower.

I don't do any of that and I suggest you also leave the flowers alone.

Problems when growing cilantro

The biggest problem when growing cilantro is that the plants are so sensitive to heat - and also to other stresses. Anything that stresses them will cause them to bolt (meaning they will grow a flower prematurely and set seed).

Select your site well. During the cooler times of the year (Or in cooler climates) choose a spot in full sun. If you expect hot weather, give your cilantro plants some shade.

Make sure your cilantro plants never dry out. (As always, mulch helps.)

Many people underestimate the amount of water cilantro needs, because most herbs we know are so hardy. So water it well, but of course, make sure the soil drains well. Few plants like growing in a bog hole...

Apart from that cilantro has no special soil requirements. Rich, dark soil always produces the biggest, healthiest plants, but any reasonable soil with average nutrient levels should be fine. If you want to feed your plants extra, some dilute liquid fertilizer like fish emulsion never goes astray.

One more thing: **cilantro plants do not like humidity**. In my climate they will bolt to seed from the heat before humidity becomes a problem, but your climate may be different. Always grow cilantro where the air can circulate freely.

Growing cilantro in the tropical permaculture garden

I said above that **cilantro grows itself**. That's exactly what it does: it self seeds. I have cilantro growing everywhere in my permaculture garden.

When it warms up towards the wet season the cilantro goes to seed. Although I always go around and harvest the dry flower heads, there are still many seeds that fall on the ground.

The fabulous thing about the coriander seeds is that they don't rot over the wet season like the seeds of many other annuals do.

Coriander seeds just sit there, through the heat, the torrential downpours, months of steamy soggy weather, and they wait.

They wait until the next dry season comes around. And as soon as you get the first crisp nights, new cilantro plants pop up all over your garden!

In the early days I was still growing cilantro in rows near the kitchen door. But these days I don't bother. During the dry season there is a lot more cilantro growing in my garden than I could eat, and that's although I LOVE fresh coriander leaf.

And for those readers who do not live in the tropics: as long as your winters are mild, this method will still work for you. Grow cilantro during summer. It will self seed, wait for the very cold weather to pass, and come back in spring.

Everybody else needs to harvest the coriander seeds and replant at the beginning of the next growing season.

Harvesting coriander seed

Harvesting coriander seed is an easy affair. Just wait till the flower heads are dry.

(The whole head can measure a foot or more across.)

Then cut the stalk, stick the whole thing upside down in a big paper bag and leave it in a dry spot for a couple of weeks. (Most people recommend to hang it up. In my place it just lies around somewhere...)

After a couple of weeks you take the bag and shake it and bash it and all the coriander seeds should fall off and you can pull out the bare stalk. Keep your coriander seeds in a cool dry place.

(Most people recommend an airtight container. In my place they just stay in that bag...)

And now you should have enough coriander seed to cook with (great ground in soups, sauces and rice) and still plenty left to throw around your garden next year!

(But also grow a few coriander plants the old fashioned way, by sticking the seed in the ground where you want them, just in case...)