

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER
Tip of the Week
By Beverly Wickersham
“Horseradish, 2011 Herb of the Year”

Horseradish, (*Armoracia rusticana*) is a perennial herb of many uses. It is a member of the Cruciferae (Mustard) family, and like other family members bears a flower that has four petals arranged in the shape of a cross. Early spring is the best time to plant the dormant roots which can be ordered from garden suppliers or dug from a friend's "horseradish" garden. Roots may be also purchased from a grocery store that carries fresh horseradish.

Plant the root in a sunny location in soil that drains well. The root top should be at ground level after planting. The roots will form many branches, and these lateral (branch) roots are what should be harvested, leaving the remaining roots to continue growing and multiplying. It also has flowers for beauty. (A Caution) Horseradish is an aggressive plant. Once established, you will always have Horseradish. It may be preferable to confine this herb to an isolated spot away from other plants.

Horseradish is said to be one of the five bitter herbs the Jews were commanded to eat at the Passover meal. The other four were Coriander, Horehound, Nettle and Lettuce. These herbs are still commonly used in the Passover Seder. This "bitter herb" has medicinal value also. In fact, it was used as a medicine before it was used as a food. Both roots and leaves have been used as a stimulant to the appetite, a diuretic, a treatment to prevent and expel kidney stones, an expectorant, and an antibiotic.

To prepare Horseradish for use in cooking, grate the firm, white root on the fine edge of a grater (or use your blender) to bring about the chemical reaction between constituents that are found in the separate cells of the root. Surprisingly, the biting taste and pungent aroma do not exist in the unbroken root! It is developed by the chemical reaction that occurs during the grating process. The addition of white vinegar to the grated horseradish stabilizes the degree of hotness in the product. Add vinegar immediately after grating for a mild horseradish, or wait three minutes before adding vinegar for a hotter version. Use 2 to 3 tablespoons of white vinegar and 1/2 teaspoon of salt for each cup of grated horseradish.

Horseradish roots can be stored up to 3 months in a cool place before becoming bitter.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com



Horseradish root



Horseradish harvested