

Epazote

Chenopodium ambrosioides



Essential in traditional Mexican and South American cooking, especially bean dishes and soups, and in contemporary Latino fusion fare. There is no real substitute for it. The fresh leaves are like "grassy turpentine" but when simmered in a pot of black beans, the flavour "mellows to a rich, grounding presence that more and more chefs are finding addictive," according to the trend-spotting Center for Culinary Development. Its use in food may related to ancient medicinal use. Since the time of the Aztecs it has been used to treat intestinal parasites and flatulence, and an early innovation may have been to add it to foods as a preventative measure.

The seeds and the oil from the seeds are traditionally prescribed to expel intestinal parasites, and the oil is used in soaps, perfumes and detergents today. Some studies have shown epazote to be effective against athlete's foot.

The plant prefers a rich, well-drained soil in a sunny position, but will tolerate poor soil. Pinch back to keep from going to seed. Younger leaves have a milder, richer flavour. Harvest leaves before the plant flowers and sets seed for best flavour.