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The epazote herb is commonly used in the cuisines and traditional medicines of central and southern Mexico and Guatemala. Epazote has a strong taste and aroma, so not everyone takes to it right away.

It can be somewhat of an acquired taste, but it adds a wonderful rustic layer of flavor to many dishes.

While it is best to use fresh epazote, the dried form can be used if no fresh herbs are available.

The peak season for the herb is in winter, but it is available year-round.

What Is Epazote?

Epazote (pronounced eh-pah-ZOH-teh) is an aromatic herb; both the fresh leaves and tender stems are used in cooking.

The epazote plant is a leafy annual or short-lived perennial plant that can reach 4 feet in height.

Its dark green, long, slender, jagged leaves end in a point.

The flowers are green and very small; they produce thousands of tiny seeds.

As an herb, it is suitable for gluten-free, vegan, vegetarian, and paleo diets.

Origins

Native to Central America, epazote has been grown for culinary and medicinal purposes for countless generations.

This herb is used in everyday cooking in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca and the Yucatan Peninsula among the Mayan-speaking peoples.

Epazote has spread as a weed (growing in empty lots and by the roadside) in Europe and Asia.

The word epazote derives from Nahuatl, the language spoken by Mexican Aztecs and their ancestors.

A literal translation to English would be something like "stinky & sweat" (not very appetizing!).

In some parts of Mexico and Guatemala, the plant is called pazote, ipazote, apazote, hierba hedionda ("stinky weed"), pazoli, and pizate.

In Peru, it is known as paico, a word that comes from Quechua.

In English it is sometimes called goosefoot, skunk weed, wormseed, or Mexican tea; the last two of these terms allude to its medicinal use to combat intestinal parasites.

What Does It Taste Like?

Epazote has a somewhat pungent flavor profile and is described by many as "medicinal."

It has notes of oregano, anise, citrus, mint, and even tar or creosote.