

EPAZOTE Science Page

DID YOU KNOW?

Epazote has been used for centuries to flavor foods and to rid people of intestinal worms. The early Mayans were the first to use it. Many Latin Americans still use it today.



In the U.S., epazote is grown in large fields. Drug companies use the seeds to make medicine. That explains why it is sometimes called "American wormseed."

ORIGINS

Epazote is native to Central America.

Native people in central Mexico speak Nahuatl. The name "epazote" comes from the Nahuatl words "eptl" and "tzotl," which mean "skunk sweat." As you might guess, epazote has a very strong scent!

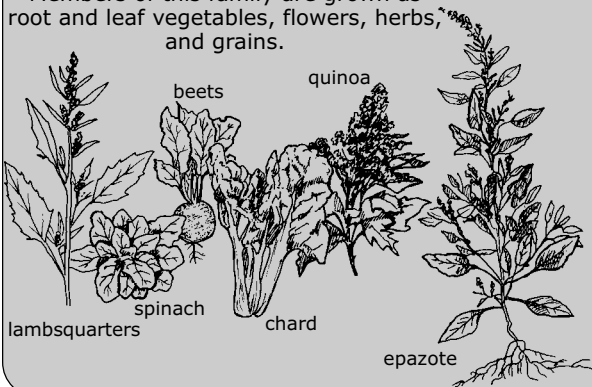


CLASSIFYING EPAZOTE

FAMILY

Chenopodiaceae

Members of this family are grown as root and leaf vegetables, flowers, herbs, and grains.



GENUS

Chenopodium

In Greek this means "goose foot." The name refers to the shape of the leaves of some plants in this genus.



SPECIES

ambrosioides

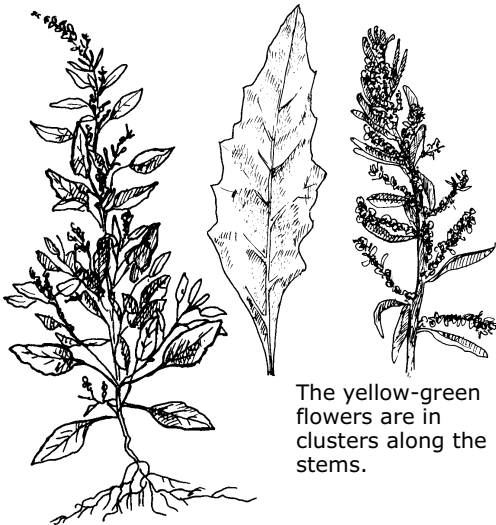
In Greek this means "food of the gods." The name probably refers to its strong scent.



THE EPAZOTE PLANT

The epazote plant can reach 60 to 120 cm high.

Epazote has sharp-toothed leaves.



The yellow-green flowers are in clusters along the stems.

Epazote produces thousands of tiny black seeds in small fruit clusters.

GROWING AND HARVESTING EPAZOTE

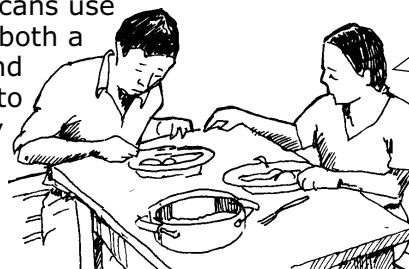
Epazote is easy to grow. It grows almost anywhere, but prefers a sandy loam soil and full sun. The plant produces thousands of tiny seeds, and can become a weed in your garden.



Epazote has a strong taste, so I only need one or two sprigs to flavor my rice and beans.

USES

Latin Americans use epazote as both a medicine and as an herb to flavor many different dishes.



I'm glad I planted epazote in my garden. This corn dish with epazote tastes just like my mother used to make when I lived in Mexico.



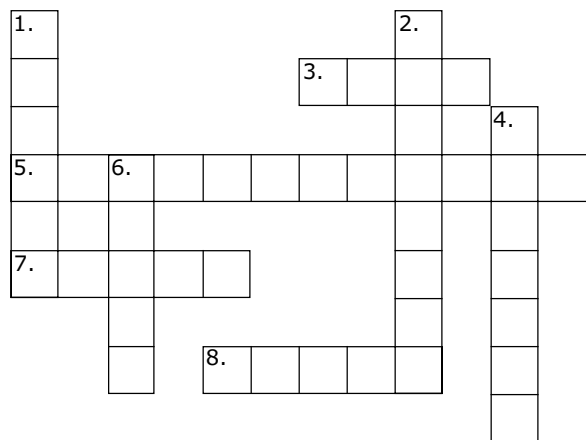
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Across:

- Because it produces thousands of tiny seeds, epazote can become a garden _____.
- The scientific name for epazote is *Chenopodium* _____.
- Epazote has a strong _____.
- Epazote is used traditionally as a medicine to rid people of _____.

Down:

- The early _____ were the first to use epazote.
- _____ use epazote as an herb to flavor many different dishes.
- Epazote is native to _____ America.
- A root vegetable that is in the same family as epazote.



Crossword puzzle answers: Across: 3. weed; 5. *Ambrosioides*; 7. scent; 8. worms. Down: 1. Mayans; 2. Mexicans; 4. Central; 6. beets.



SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

Epazote is used to treat dogs for worms

Researchers wanted to find out what folk medicines people in Trinidad and Tobago use to treat dogs. To answer this question, they interviewed 28 people who practice folk medicine on dogs, as well as 30 veterinarians, 27 extension workers, and 19 animal-health assistants. Then they held four workshops for 55 people to discuss and clarify the data from the interviews. After this, they conducted more interviews. The interviews and workshops took place over several years.

The researchers were able to document the use of several plants to treat dogs in Trinidad and Tobago. They discovered that epazote is one of the most frequently used species. It is used to rid dogs of intestinal worms, in much the same way that it is used to treat humans for intestinal worms.

Source: Lans, C., T. Harper, K. Georges, and E. Bridgewater. (2000). Medicinal plants used for dogs in Trinidad and Tobago. *Preventive Veterinary Medicine*. 45 (3-4), 201-210.

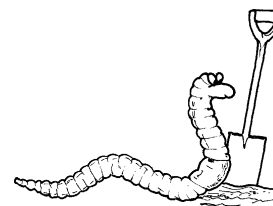
Warning: Large doses of epazote can be poisonous to animals and humans. Always remember that you should consult a doctor before using plants for medicinal purposes.



RIDDLE

What does the worm plant in his garden?

Answer: Wormseed!



BLACK BEANS WITH EPAZOTE

Mexicans often use epazote to flavor beans. It can actually stop gas from forming, a well-known side effect of eating beans!

Yield: serves 6 - 8

Ingredients

- * canola oil
- * 1 large onion, chopped
- * 3 cloves garlic, minced
- * 2 cups dried black beans
- * 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- * 1 small dried red chili pepper, crushed
- * 1 sprig of fresh epazote
- * 6 cups of water
- * salt

For toppings:

- * green onions
- * tomatoes
- * sour cream
- * chili flakes
- * shredded Monterey Jack or cheddar cheese

Instructions

- Heat oil in a pot. Add onion and garlic and cook until lightly browned. Then add the cumin.
- Rinse the beans well. Add beans and epazote to the pot and pour in water. Raise heat to high and bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer until beans are tender (for 2 to 2 1/2 hours). (Tip: Never soak beans in cold water before cooking, as this gives them a bad taste. To save energy, you can bring them to a boil, and then turn off the heat, cover, and let them sit for an hour before cooking until tender.)
- Add salt to taste. (Tip: Never salt beans until they are soft, as salt will toughen them.)
- Serve with chopped green onions, tomatoes, sour cream, chili flakes, and cheese.