

Horseradish!

HERB OF
THE YEAR
2011

HORSERADISH, THE TANGY ROOT, is the year's International Herb Association's selection as herb of the year. Why not? It is reported that the Oracle at Delphi told Apollo that horseradish was worth its weight in gold. Originally a wild-crafted plant in eastern Europe, horseradish has been used to put zing in dishes for time out of memory. It is high in vitamin C and has anti-microbial properties to preserve meat. Nearly half of the U.S. production of horseradish is grown in one county in Illinois. Practically all of the prepared horseradish we eat is processed in Baltimore.

Horseradish is a hardy perennial and grows well in the mid-Atlantic region. As with many root vegetables, it likes fairly loamy soil, but will grow in most soils. The plant grows from roots, preferably those about the size of your finger. Plant the roots about three inches deep. Be sure that they are planted "right end up." (Commercial horseradish growers keep the roots "right end up" by cutting the top end at an angle and the bottom end straight across.) Plant horseradish in the spring as soon as the soil can be worked. The plants will be ready to harvest in the fall but can be overwintered in the ground. (Tom's mother always had him dig horseradish in the spring to serve with the Easter ham.)

To prepare horseradish, thoroughly wash the roots to remove dirt. Grating horseradish can be a tearful experience; we recommend that you do it outside with the breeze at your back. Add a

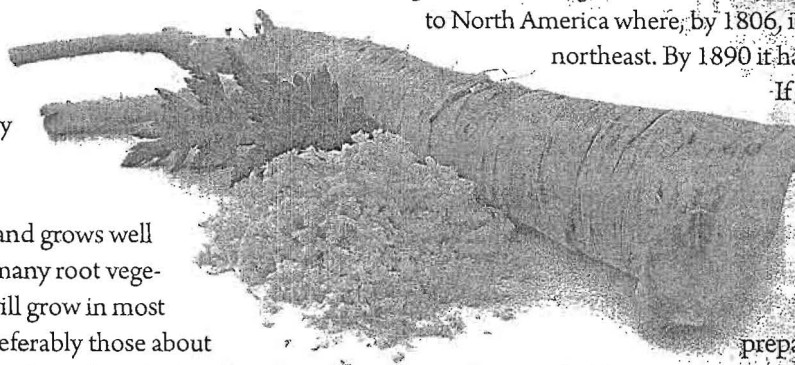
quarter cup of vinegar to a cup of grated horseradish; add salt to taste. Store grated root in the refrigerator in a tightly closed jar for up to two months; for longer storage, freeze the grated root.

Horseradish did not become an acceptable condiment in England until the late 1600s (previously, having been thought "too strong for tender and gentle stomachs"). The colonists brought it to North America where, by 1806, it was common in the northeast. By 1890 it had escaped into the wild.

If you are growing it, you will find that even if you harvest it, the smallest piece of root will produce a new plant next year.

Freshly grated or prepared horseradish can

be mixed with mayonnaise, sour cream, yogurt, cream cheese, chopped herbs (such as garlic, parsley, chives, tarragon, basil) added along with a little mustard, paprika, a pinch of sugar, or dash of lemon juice or vinegar, salt and pepper. This sauce can be used as a dip, sandwich spread, with beef, fish, slaw, vegetables or potatoes. In eastern European cooking, it is sometimes mixed with grated beets to use with poultry, fish and eggs (thus, the grated horseradish at Easter). Try butter with grated horseradish on rolls, bread, vegetables, potatoes, or fish. The greatest surprise of ever, however, is the recipe below from Susan Belinger; it must be made with freshly grated horseradish. ♪



Apple Pie with Horseradish & Cheddar Cheese

5 medium-large tart apples	1/4 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup white sugar	1/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
3 tablespoons unbleached flour	2 9-inch pie crusts
1/4 cup freshly grated horseradish	Sharp cheddar cheese
2 1/2 tablespoons lemon juice	

Preheat oven to 425° F. Peel, core, and slice apples into bowl. Add the lemon juice a little at a time, to keep apples from turning brown. Add sugars, flour, nutmeg, and horseradish; toss well.

Roll pie crusts out on floured surface. Place bottom crust in the pie plate, put apple mixture in it. Cover with top crust and crimp edges. Prick top crust with a fork in several places.

Bake pie in center of oven for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 350° F, and bake pie for about 45 minutes longer, until top is golden brown. Remove from oven and cool. Serve warm or at room temperature, with slices of cheddar cheese.

