

Endive (Greens)

Interesting facts: This curly, leafy green is a type of chicory plant that is interchangeably called by its different varieties, frisée and escarole, in the culinary arts. This particular endive's name is pronounced "ehn-dive", not "on-deeve" like the Belgian variety which is rocket shaped.

Curly endive or frisée is a loose-headed plant that has narrow, curly leaves and an intense peppery taste. The leaves in the center are light-green with a milder taste which gradually grows darker and more intense in flavor on the outer leaves.

Escarole leaves are rounder, broader and feature a flattened head (similar to green leaf lettuce). The leaves are creamy yellow-green in the center and graduates to dark green on the lightly ruffled edges. Escarole is usually less bitter than curly endive.

Belgian endive (pronounced "on-deeve") was an accidental discovery by a farmer named Jan Lammers in Brussels, Belgium. It comes from the same chicory plant that the curly endive variety comes from. After harvesting the curly greens, Jan stored the roots in his dark warm cellar to dry and roast them as a coffee additive or substitute. He forgot about them and when he came back for the roots, he discovered that they had sprouted a white, tender but crunchy, rocket-shaped shoot. This Belgian variety does not grow naturally but is forced to do so in the fall after the curly variety has been harvested.

How to select: Choose crispy, fresh, brightly colored leafy tops. For Belgian endive, choose spears that are tightly closed, smooth, shiny, and plump. The leaf edges should have a light-yellow tinge. Always buy organic.

What to avoid: Avoid curly greens that are dry, yellowing or browning. Avoid Belgian endive spears that are loose, open, wilted, or browning at the leaf tips.

How to clean and store: Wash the curly endive leaves in cool running water and shake off the excess water. Remove the tough lower ends. Store the endive greens in a plastic bag and refrigerate to stay fresh for 3 to 4 days.

For Belgian endive, wrap the endive in a damp paper towel and place in a plastic bag. It will keep fresh for up to 5 days in the refrigerator. Do not wash or soak the endive in water before storing, it will make it more bitter tasting. Instead, wipe the outer leaves with a damp cloth or paper towel.

How to prepare and cook: Raw, Sautéed, Grilled.

Raw: Enjoy these greens raw in a salad.

Sautéed: Sauté in 1 tablespoon organic extra virgin olive oil over medium heat until the endive greens are wilted.

Grilled: Brush each Belgian endive spear with olive oil and grill until browned and slightly wilted.

Recipe Idea:

Salad: Slice 2 apples into thin wedges and add to the endive in a large bowl. Mix in ½ cup chopped toasted walnuts. In a small bowl, combine 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, the zest and juice of half a lemon, 1 tsp. dried dill, and kosher salt to taste. Add the dressing to the salad and toss to mix.

Grilled Belgian endive: You can top grilled endive with balsamic vinegar and olive oil salt and pepper and toasted walnuts to make a great side dish.