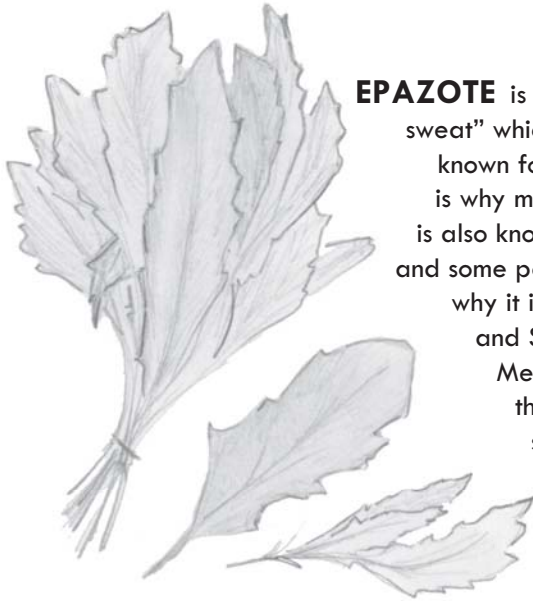


EPAZOTE



EPAZOTE is an ancient Aztec word meaning “skunk-sweat” which refers to its strong smell. Epazote is well known for reducing uncomfortable intestinal gas which is why many people use it when cooking bean dishes. It is also known to be a vermifuge that kills intestinal worms and some people use it in animal feed to reduce worms which is why it is sometimes called ‘wormseed’. A native to Central and Southern Mexico, it grows wild in many areas of Mexico and the United States. It is available here in the Northeast during the summer when the climate is similar to that of Central Mexico.

STORAGE

- ◆ This delicate herb should be **eaten as soon as possible**.
- ◆ It will keep for several days if it’s wrapped unwashed in a damp paper towel in the refrigerator drawer, or loosely packed in a plastic container.
- ◆ Epazote can also be **dried** by hanging the washed leaves upside-down in a cool, dark place. When dry, crush the leaves and store in an airtight container.

PREPARATION

- ◆ Wash the epazote leaves in cold water.
- ◆ You can use the leaves **chopped or whole** in whatever you are cooking. Epazote has a very strong flavor, so one or two leaves will spice an entire pot.
- ◆ Epazote is popular in many traditional **Mexican recipes**, especially bean dishes. It is also used in **salsas** and **soups** and to flavor eggs, meat, chicken and fish.
- ◆ Epazote can also be used with dairy dishes such as in **cheese quesadillas**.
- ◆ The leaves have a lemony or acidic flavor that has been compared to cilantro. You can try substituting epazote for cilantro in salsas and other recipes.

Nutritional Information

Epazote is an excellent source of folate and a good source of vitamin C. A healthy diet with enough folate may reduce a woman’s risk of having a child with certain birth defects of the brain or spinal chord. Vitamin C is important in immune response, wound healing, and allergic reactions. Vitamin C also helps with iron absorption.

Epazote Recipes

Corn Cooked with Epazote (Serves 6)

- 2 Tablespoons unsalted butter
- 3 Tablespoons vegetable oil
- 6 small ears of corn, remove leaves and silk, cut ears into 1 ½-inch-thick slices
- 1 ½ teaspoons salt
- 2 Serrano chilies or any fresh, hot green chilies, finely chopped
- 3 heaping Tablespoons chopped epazote leaves



Heat a heavy pan into which the corn will just fit in one layer. Melt the butter and oil together in the pan, then add the corn, salt and chilies. Cover the pan and cook the corn over medium heat, shaking the pan from time to time and turning the corn over once, until it is tender and slightly browned (about 15 minutes). Stir in the epazote for the last 3 minutes of cooking time. (Although the ears are sliced only the kernels are eaten.)

Adapted from The Essential Cuisines of Mexico by Diana Kennedy, copyright 2000 by Diana Kennedy

Frijoles de olla (Serves 10)

- 1 pound dried black beans, rinsed thoroughly and checked for foreign particles like small stones
- 10 to 12 cups hot water, approximately
- 1/3 cup sliced white onion
- 2 Tablespoons vegetable oil
- Salt
- 2 large sprigs epazote



Put beans in a pot and cover with the hot water. Add the onion and oil and bring to a boil, then lower the heat and let the beans simmer, covered, until they are just soft and the skins are breaking open—approximately 4 hours, although times can vary greatly. Add the salt and continue cooking over low heat for another 1/2 hour or more, until the beans are completely soft. Add the epazote towards the end of the cooking time. These beans will keep in the refrigerator for about 2 days and can be frozen for up to 3 months.

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Cheese Quesadillas (Serves 4)

- 6 flour tortillas
- Grated cheese, like Monterrey jack or cheddar
- A little salsa if desired
- 1 epazote leaf, chopped



Preheat an oven to 400 degrees. Place 3 of the tortillas on a baking sheet. Sprinkle each with the desired amount of cheese, salsa, and epazote. Top each tortilla with another, like a sandwich. Cook the quesadillas in the oven for about 5 minutes or until the underside is crispy. Then flip them over with a spatula so that the other side gets crispy too and all the cheese is melted. Cut the quesadilla with a knife or pizza cutter into wedges. Serve immediately. (They can also be cooked in large pan over medium-high heat like a pancake, if an oven is not available). Serve with salsa.

Recipe from Adrienne Maher, Just Food Dietetic Intern, 2001