Endive

History

It was 1830 in Brussels, Belgium, when Jan Lammers left his farm to fight in the Belgian War of Independence. He left chicory root in his cellar with plans to dry and roast them to make a coffee substitute. When he returned months later, he discovered white leaves had sprouted. Upon tasting it, he realized the leaves were crunchy and tasty. Thus, the world was introduced to endive.

Growing endive is very difficult and requires a two-step process. During the first step, it is grown in a field for 150 days. During this time, it develops a tap root and leafy green tops. The second step requires cutting off the tops, digging up the remaining root, and moving it into cold storage for 28 days. The cold storage climate is similar to that required of mushrooms; dark, cool, and humid. Because the second step is typically done in a controlled environment, endive can be grown year round.

Endive can have a nutty to bitter flavor. It is a good source of vitamins B, C, and K, and minerals calcium, iron, zinc, magnesium, potassium, folate, and selenium. Endive only has one calorie per leaf and is low in sodium, fat, and cholesterol.

You may find endive in its red or white variety. Leaves should be smooth and tightly packed when you buy it. You may eat endive raw or cooked.

Varieties

Curly Endive is pronounced “in-dive.” It often gets mistaken for chicory. It is harvested after two months in a field, therefore, it has loose, lacy leaves. One variety is escarole, which has broad leaves and does not taste quite as bitter as other varieties. Another variety is frisee, which has fine cut, frizzy leaves.

California endive is pronounced “on-deev,” and it is often referred to as a Belgian endive. It has tightly packed, long, smooth leaves. The entire plant is white, due to its second period of growth in the dark.

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