

Red Veined Sorrel



Rumex sanguineus

Sorrel has never been a very popular culinary herb in Britain. Possibly there's a clue in the name which is derived from the French for sour. However, it's recently developed a bit of a reputation as a gourmet ingredient. The flavour is very acidic, almost lemon. It's a versatile herb used in salads, soups and sauces.

This red sorrel is a beautiful and unusual culinary herb. It is a very useful perennial with a productive season which runs from March until the first frosts.

It is hardy, and it does best in dampish soils, so a bit of extra water during the summer heat will give much better leaves for picking. When the plant starts to throw up flowering shoots the leaves become tougher and have less flavour, so cut off the flower stalks as they appear.

Of all the various types of sorrel this is the most ornamental, with striking bright red veins and mid-ribs.

- The smallest young leaves are best for salads and are always a welcome first crop in spring to brighten up the salad bowl. The leaves have a sharp lemony tang which can be quite strong, so use sparingly to begin with.
- As well as in salads, sorrel enhances the flavour of fish and eggs - add a few shreds of finely sliced young leaves at the last moment.
- As the leaves get bigger, they can be cooked and added to dishes in the same way as spinach, heat dulls the flavour a little so you can add more leaves without the fear of making the dish too tart.
- In mid-summer when the leaves are large, they can be wrapped around joints of meat such as pork or chicken, or whole fish such as salmon or mackerel for baking. They act as a tenderiser as well as a flavouring, to brown the meat remove the leaves 30 minutes before the end of cooking time.
- Sorrel puree is really easy to make, just take a handful of washed leaves and remove the mid-ribs. Throw them, still wet, into a small pan with some melted butter. The leaves melt down almost immediately to give a lemony puree which tastes great with fish or eggs. A little cream can be added if you wish. This puree freezes well, so make it when you have a glut of sorrel for winter use.
- Sorrel soup is a classic way to cook sorrel and makes a tasty supper with some crusty bread.
- Be aware that sorrel contains large amounts of oxalic acid and should be used in moderation or it can cause digestive upset.