

פּוּרְטוּלָקָה, רִגְלֵת הַגֶּנָה, Purslane – Portulaca Oleracea



Omega 3 Rich, Welcome Volunteer, Summer Latecomer

The good thing about purslane is that it is a nutritious green plant that pops up during the heat of summer – usually in the month of Av – when most other greens have dried out. It emerges in the middle of my wilted vegetable garden and all around the edges of my flowerless flowerbeds. Purslane needs very little water and spreads like a creeping mat, carpeting the soil between other plants. Many people consider purslane to be a weed. I prefer the term ‘volunteer.’ It is a wonderfully crisp vegetable with a full, green flavor that wakes up any salad. Purslane is a welcome latecomer to include in all kinds of salads, smoothies and stir-fries. It has tiny, inconspicuous flowers, appearing at the ends of each branch, open only for 2-3 hours. It originates from India, where it has been eaten for thousands of years as a high ranking succulent green. It is mentioned in a Talmudic section discussing meanings of Hebrew words that were forgotten. A group of Rebbe Yehuda’s disciples came to ask him about the meaning of two seemingly obscure words – serugim and chalaglogot. When a disciple entered with an armful of purslane, they learned the meaning of these two obscure words from Rebbe’s maidservant admonished the disciple for littering the clean floor with chalaglogot i.e. purslane. Purslane later immigrated to Europe where it was favored and cultivated as a common garden vegetable. In Israel, I’ve found wild purslane on the list of vegetables to order from organic farm distributors. The lowly and humble purslane is one of the few plant sources of [Omega 3 fatty acids](#) growing wild all over neglected gardens and fields free for the taking. If you currently take fish oil capsules, omega-3 oil capsules, or anti-depressants, a switch to purslane could improve your health and save you lots of money. I let the purslane in my garden grow to a decent size, then snip off branches into my basket, rather than pulling up the roots, so it can develop new growth and supply the table for weeks. In the kitchen, I pluck off the leaves and pickle the stems. I harvest purslane even after it flowers and goes into seed. I simply pluck the flowering tips right along with the leaves, all are perfectly edible. Purslane is a succulent, meaning juicy and moist. Each of its little teardrop-shaped leaves are thick and fleshy, with a waxy surface. Inside, they are what is called in the herb-world ‘mucilaginous.’ This means it has a slippery, gelatinous texture, much like aloe vera or okra. These [mucilaginous](#) properties are very useful in herbal medicine for all manner of ailments, both internal and external.

Purslane Power

Purslane is a very nutritious weed that grows where you didn’t plant it and if you are lucky it shows up in your garden or yard. This lemony flavored plant is a powerhouse of nutrition. It’s Omega 3 helps prevent inflammation, supports brain health, and strengthens the immune and cardiovascular systems. Eating purslane is tastier, safer, and more effective than taking omega-3 supplements. Think of this plant as brain food and eat it! To increase the effect, add cold pressed walnut oil to your purslane. Purslane-fed chickens lay eggs that have twenty times more



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omega-3's than regular eggs. Besides containing high levels of beneficial Omega 3 fatty acids, this invasive weed is unusually high in vitamin A, with good amounts of vitamins C, B complex as well as proteins, and nutrients including iron, calcium, magnesium, potassium, zinc and nitrate. Furthermore, purslane is loaded with antioxidants (beta-carotene, C, and vitamin E). A single one-cup serving contains all the vitamin E you need in a day, as well as significant amounts of vitamins C and A. One cup of fresh purslane also gives you over 2000 mg of calcium and 8000 mg of potassium. Moreover, purslane is one of the very best sources of magnesium. One-cup supplies your minimum daily need of 450 mg. Magnesium deficiency has become very prevalent, and plays a role in many heart diseases. The magnesium in purslane helps lower elevated blood fat values and hence reduce the risk of heart attacks and blood clots. For people suffering from high blood pressure (hypertension), it is recommended to eat plenty of vegetables that contain magnesium such as purslane, spinach and green beans. Food containing high levels of magnesium and potassium have an anti-depressant effect as well. Thus, purslane is one of the five herbs – together with lettuce, amaranth greens, lamb's quarters greens and watercress – richest in antidepressant substances. Purslane is also a superior source of herbs known to moderate the effects of depressive brain chemicals such as calcium, magnesium, potassium, phenylalanine, tryptophan and lithium. In Chinese medicine, purslane is used as a remedy for diarrhea, bacterial dysentery, fever and urinary tract infections.

Medicinal Properties of Purslane

According to Oriental Medicine, the energetics of purslane is sour and cold, hence it is a good cooling food for the summer. It affects the colon, liver, spleen Meridians.

Skin Purslane has a cooling, anti-inflammatory affect along with soothing and healing mucilaginous constituents, which can be used topically to cool, soothe and heal the skin. The leaves of purslane are full of sap that can be applied fresh to the skin in order to relieve inflammation, insect bites, bee stings, snakebites, inflamed skin, skin sores and burns. It may also be helpful as a relief for boils and eczema. The plant contains many valuable antioxidants, including carotenoids and may be used as a facemask to cleanse, refresh and tighten the skin. In addition, the freshly crushed leaves can be used in the form of a poultice for headaches, sore eyes, and gout.

Digestive system Purslane helps to reduce inflammation and speed the healing of the gastrointestinal tract. Due to the plant's high content of mucilage, it has soothing properties that can be used for gastrointestinal problems such as diarrhea, dysentery, acute enteritis (inflammation of the small intestine), appendicitis and hemorrhoids. Adding it to your diet helps to reduce ulcers, colitis and any inflamed area of the intestines. The seeds have been used against intestinal worms.

Detoxifies Purslane has diuretic properties and can be used to cleanse the body of toxins and as a cooling and fever-lowering agent. It may also be helpful as an herbal remedy for ailments related to the urinary tract.

Female Ailments The herb has also been used to treat mastitis (inflammation of the mammary gland), postpartum bleeding. Yet, purslane is contraindicated during pregnancy, as it may have a contracting effect on the uterus.

Cough & Tuberculosis The fresh squeezed sap may be used to counteract cough. Mix fresh purslane juice with honey (made into a sticky paste by heating) to expel phlegm, add garlic and drink as tea to treat tuberculosis.

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Due to its high vitamin C content purslane treats scurvy. In addition, it is used to treat various other ailments such as fever and inflammation, hemorrhages, foot tinea, and edema.

Side effects Since purslane is a cooling herb, excessive ingestion of purslane is contraindicated for individuals with cold and weak digestion and spleens.

Culinary Uses

Purslane has a great taste and is replete with nutritional virtues, vitamins and minerals. It is mentioned in the Talmud as one of the edible plants that qualifies for making an eruv tavshilin that permits cooking for Shabbat on the holidays (*Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 28a*). It ripens around the same time as cucumbers, zucchinis and green beans, and it is available right through tomato season as well. During these hot summer days, it is simple to add a handful of purslane to any cooling summer salad, such as cucumber and tomato salads or mix chopped purslane with yogurt and garlic according to the Middle Eastern tradition. I usually eat my purslane raw; though there are recipes that call for sautéing, or using its mucilaginous properties to thicken soups and stews. The young, crispy leaves, stems and flower buds have a crisp and slightly salty flavor and can be used fresh in salads, boiled or steamed just as other vegetables or served in marinades with meat and fish dishes. The older, tougher leaves can be used to spice up soups and casseroles. When using purslane in cooking, chop the leaves finely and add at the end of the cooking to preserve the delicate flavor and the content of vitamins. You may also add some raw sprigs for a nutritious garnish.

Hands On

Purslane is easy to cultivate. The plant grows best in a nutritious well-drained soil in sunny areas. It is important to keep the soil evenly moist to ensure that the plant becomes fertile. The seed is sown directly into final growing places in the spring, and often multiple times throughout the summer in order to have a steady supply of healthy plants over a longer period. The leaves can be picked from the plants six to eight weeks after sowing. This is a valuable and easily grown extra salad plant.

Purslane Cucumber Salad

6 Medium sized cucumbers, sliced
 2 Cups Purslane leaves
 1 Cup yogurt
 1 Tablespoon olive oil
 2 Teaspoons natural vinegar
 2 Tablespoons chopped mint
 ½ Teaspoon coarse black pepper

1. Slice cucumbers and mix together with purslane in a salad bowl.
2. In a blender, mix together the rest of the ingredients for your dressing.
3. Coat the cucumber-purslane mixture well with the dressing. Serve chilled.

Purslane and cucumbers are a match made in heaven. Don't hesitate to add purslane to any good cucumber recipe. It is best to put the dressing on just before serving. The salad becomes watery if prepared too much in advance.

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Purslane Pickles

1 Glass jar for pickling
 4 Cups purslane or enough to fill the jar
 Apple cider vinegar to fill the jar

1. Fill your jar with freshly harvested chopped purslane.
2. Leave a little space at the top.
3. Fill the jar with room temperature apple cider vinegar. Make sure to completely cover the plant material.
4. Cover with a glass or plastic lid. (Do not use metal lids as they will corrode).
5. Label your purslane pickle jars include the date.
6. Refrigerate. The pickles will be ready after six weeks but will stay good for up to a year.

Using a tablespoon of purslane vinegar on cooked greens, beans, and salads adds wonderful flavor along with lots of minerals. You can also eat the pickled purslane right out of the bottle or add it to salads or beans.

Purslane Gazpacho

2 Cups tomato juice
 4 Cups diced tomatoes
 1 Cucumber, peeled and finely minced
 1-2 Cups Purslane leaves (no need to chop unless they are exceptionally large)
 ½ Cup finely minced onion or green scallions
 1 Clove garlic, minced fine
 3 Tablespoon lemon juice
 2 Tablespoons natural vinegar
 1 Teaspoon minced basil
 ¼ Cup minced parsley
 A generous handful of fresh basil leaves
 1 Teaspoon tarragon and ¼ to ½ tsp cumin (optionally)
 2 to 3 Tablespoons olive oil
 Sea-salt and pepper to taste

1. Combine all the above ingredients except half of the diced cucumber and tomatoes, and a few of the purslane and fresh herb sprigs.
2. Puree the mixture in a blender or food processor.
3. Add the unprocessed vegetables and herbs for a nice chunky consistency.
4. Chill until very cold. Serve with an extra sprig of purslane for a garnish.

Gazpacho is a cold summer soup, made with fresh raw late summer garden vegetables. Since purslane likes to grow when all these are ripe, it is a natural addition to any gazpacho. You can add it quite liberally, as it is mild and sweet and boosts the nutritional value tremendously.