

Home Gardening Series

# Chicory

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Vegetables

## Environment

**Light** – sunny  
**Soil** – well-drained loam  
**Fertility** – medium  
**pH** – 5.8 to 6.5  
**Temperature** – cool  
**Moisture** – moist

## Culture

**Planting** – seeds early spring  
**Spacing** – 9 x 24 inches  
**Hardiness** – hardy  
**Fertilizer** – medium

## Chicory – *Chicorium intybus*

Chicory is an unusual plant in that, although it has been cultivated for over 1,000 years, it is still very wild-looking and shows but slight effects of its association with man. Chicory is a native of Europe but is common as a weed in the United States.

Chicory is a hardy vegetable that is used in three basic forms. The roots are dried, roasted and prepared as a coffee substitute or coffee blend. The slightly bitter, curled, dandelion-like greens *cicoria* (called Italian Dandelion) are grown and used as potherbs. Witloof Chicory (also called French Endive) is forced as a blanched, tender, fresh salad delicacy. It is sold in some produce markets at high prices.

## Cultural Practices

Plant seeds 1/2 inch deep (12 to 15 seeds per foot of row). Allow 18 to 24 inches between rows. When the seedlings are 2 to 3 inches high, thin to 9 to 12 inches apart for chicory roots and greens and 3 to 4 inches apart for Witloof. Plant in May for greens and roots and about 120 days before frost for production of roots for forcing.

**Greens** – Young, tender leaves can be harvested for greens in 60 to 70 days when they are 6 to 8 inches long. Chicory may be blanched by tying the outermost leaves in the same manner as endive and escarole.

**Chicory Root** – Chicory root is grown as a long-season annual. Most commercial production is in Michigan, but chicory root is easily grown under Arkansas conditions. Dig roots in the late fall before they are frozen in the garden. The roots will be 5 to 7 inches in diameter at the crown and tapered into a taproot. The usable root will be 9 to 10 inches long. The roots are scrubbed to remove garden soil, cubed and roasted for grinding.

**Forcing Chicory** – Do not plant seeds too early for forcing roots. The roots may grow too large or develop flower stalks, making them unsuitable for forcing. Roots with a diameter of 1 to 1 3/4 inches at the crown are preferred for forcing. When the

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## Cultivars

| Crop                        | Variety                          | Days to Maturity | Seed/ 100 Ft of Row | Disease Resistance or Tolerance | Sources (see "Sources" paragraph below) | Remarks  |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Chicory                     |                                  |                  |                     |                                 |   |  |
| Catalogna/<br>Cut leaf type | Catalogna Special                | 40               | 1/16 oz             |                                 | 16                                      | Italian dandelion. Can be harvested "baby size" 3 to 4 weeks after transplanting or left to grow into heavy, tall bunches. Long, deep green, slender, deeply cut leaves.   |
|                             | Magdefurgh                       | 100              | 1/16 oz             |                                 | 32                                      | Italian dandelion. Medium green, tender, dandelion-like foliage. Excellent in salads or leaves can be cooked like spinach. Roots are tapered and white. Dried, ground up roots can be used as a coffee addition or substitute. |
|                             | San Pasquale                     | 70               | 1/16 oz             |                                 | 32, 35                                  | Broader, more deeply cut leaves than Italian dandelion. Large yields, more deeply cut leaves.  |
|                             | Catalogna Puntarelle             | 48               | 1/16 oz             |                                 | 16                                      | Can be harvested at 28 days for baby size. Nice addition to salad mixes in baby stage when the flavors are mild. Bittersweet flavor develops with maturity. Slow to bolt.  |
|                             | Red Rib                          | 55               | 1/16 oz             |                                 | 16                                      | Harvest 35 days for baby. Bright red stem and midvein with a dark green leaf.  |
| Forcing                     | Toner                            | 130              | 1/16 oz             |                                 | Not found                               | Highest quality choices, least fussy variety for home production. Intended for fall harvest and forcing October to March.  |
|                             | Witloof Improved (French endive) | 110              | 1/16 oz             |                                 | Not found                               | May be used for commercial forcing in home gardens. Broad leaf stalks, uniform heads.  |
|                             | Turbo Hybrid                     | 110              | 1/16 oz             |                                 | Not found                               | Biennial. Produces a refined chicon for European restaurant sales. Slender, well-finished, uniform heads. Tolerant to brown axes.  |
|                             | Witloof Bruxelles                | 110              | 1/16 oz             |                                 | 16, 27                                  | Root type. May be grown commercially or by small growers. Uniform leaf stalks of medium width. Great shape and excellent taste.  |
| Radicchio                   | Giulio                           | 60               | 1/16 oz             |                                 | Not found                               | For spring planting. Compact plant with brilliant garnet-colored, white-ribbed head. Resistant to bolting.   |
|                             | Adria                            | 75               | 1/16 oz             |                                 | Not found                               | Crimson heads, white veins, 60% marketable heads.  |

| Crop                 | Variety            | Days to Maturity | Seed/ 100 Ft of Row | Disease Resistance or Tolerance | Sources (see "Sources" paragraph below) | Remarks  |
|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Radicchio (cont.)    | Indigo             |                  | 1/16 oz             | TB (T), BR (T)                  | 16, 27                                  | Burgundy colored heads have good flavor, uniformity and reliability in heat and color.   |
|                      | Carmen             | 75               | 1/16 oz             |                                 | 32                                      | Improved Chioggia type, 5 1/2 inch mature heads are crimson with white veins.  |
| Tall "Trevisio" Type | Trevisio Red Preco | 68               | 1/16 oz             |                                 | 16                                      | Upright, romaine-like heads have the deep burgundy radicchio color.  |
|                      | Fiero              | 68               | 1/16 oz             |                                 | 16                                      | Large, attractive, burgundy-colored heads with contrasting white ribs, larger and deeper colored than Trevisio Red Preco. Early, uniform and sure-heading make for great yields. |

Abbreviations: **TB**: Tip Burn; **BR**: Bottom Rot; **(R)**: Resistant; **(T)**: Tolerant

weather becomes cold, dig the roots and cut off the tops about 2 inches above the crown (top of root). Store the roots in a cool place with high moisture such as an outdoor vegetable pit or underground cellar.

During the winter and early spring, roots can be prepared in a new forcing box every two to three weeks for a continuous supply. Most gardeners put their forcing boxes in the basement because lack of light does not affect the quality of the Witloof heads. Some gardeners use cold frames or hotbeds or force in a trench in the garden. A sheet of clear or black polyethylene film should be placed over the trench to increase soil temperature.

Cut off the slender tips so the roots are a uniform length (6 to 8 inches) and place the roots close together in a box or other container. Fill with sand or fine soil sifted in between the roots up to the tops of the crowns. Add 6 to 8 inches of sand or sawdust over the crowns. The blanched tops will grow into compact, pointed heads. The proper temperature for forcing is between 60 and 70 degrees F. Water thoroughly after preparing the forcing box. One or two additional waterings may be necessary. Forcing requires three to four weeks to develop firm heads.

When the heads break the surface, remove the sand or sawdust. Cut off the head with a knife at the point of attachment with the root. Prepare heads for the kitchen by removing dirty and loose outer leaves. Store the excess in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Chicory heads will keep for two to four weeks.

### Sources

For a list of sources referred to by number, request FSA6106, *Seed Sources: Vegetable and Herb*, for current address, telephone and web site.

## Frequently Asked Question

- Q. Why are Italian dandelions grouped with chicory and not the wild plant dandelion?**
- A. The name dandelion comes from French "dent de lion," meaning "lion's tooth," a reference to the jagged-edged leaves of the weed *Taraxacum officinale* that grows both wild and cultivated. Somehow the translation of the Italian green "cicoria" was translated to Italian dandelion because the leaves are similar. They are both members of the same family, but the similarity is mainly in the appearance of the leaves. Italian dandelion belongs to the genus *Chicorium* and will not become a weed problem in your lawn.

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