

Lemon Sorrel

By Barbara Morales Photography by Joseph Burgess


We all know what most lettuce tastes like....an earthy, mild flavor is a familiar one that harkens the phrase, "more dressing please." Keep your Hidden Valley in the fridge because lemon sorrel is here, and it is packed with flavor that insists on being in the spotlight.

This green's bite is tart, but deliciously unexpected. The lemon flavor of the sorrel is created by the high amount of oxalic acid in the leaves, and because of this, it is recommended that you don't cook sorrel in an aluminum pan, as the acid can react with the metal. Sorrel is a hardy perennial herb belonging to the buckwheat family that has been cultivated for over 5,000 years, and grows wild throughout Asia, Europe and North America. The Egyptians and Romans ate salads that included sorrel before heavy meals.

Sorrel has distinct, arrow-shaped leaves that measure about six inches long on a six inch stalk. Gardeners can start growing sorrel indoors during the springtime, and then it can be moved outside in later spring or early summer. If starting from seed, keep only the six healthiest seedlings as they will grow fairly large and will need room to spread out. Sorrel can be grown in full sun, and also in partial shade. It is a vigorous plant which will come back after winter if the roots are protected from the cold. Fresh sorrel is available in limited

supply year-round with spring as its peak season. When purchasing sorrel, look for leaves that are bright green and crisp, and avoid stems that are woody looking or yellow tinged.

The fresh, tart flavor of lemon sorrel is refreshingly versatile, and it adds a distinct kick to many recipes. The more acidic sorrels are commonly used in cream soups, or pureed and used as accompaniments to meat, poultry and fish. Milder flavors are often used in salad mixes, but they can also add a unique element to egg dishes and flavored breads. When using sorrel to accompany meats, chiffonade (thinly slice the herbs) the green into thin strips, pile on the plate and simply lay chicken, fish or meat on top. The heat of the entree will allow the delightful flavor of the sorrel to mingle throughout the dish. Lemon sorrel compliments fish very well. Wrap a light white fish (such as tilapia) in sorrel leaves and bake in parchment paper to create a healthy steamed entrée that is infused with a fresh lemon flavor.

The vibrant green leaves of the sorrel plant also make a beautiful garnish. Lay the leaves flat on a plate and top with cranberries or other fruits or vegetables. The plated dish will emit an appetizing aroma that will be matched by the deliciously tangy flavor of this lemony green. 

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