

SPICE OF THE MONTH

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February's spice is epazote!

At best, epazote is described as smelling of mint and anise, or lemon and anise, with a pungent flavor. But Nahuatl speakers — people native to southern Mexico and Central America, including the Aztecs, who introduced epazote into their diets — were harsher critics. They named the herb using less generous words: “epazōtl,” the Nahuatl word for epazote, is a portmanteau of the words for “skunk” and “sweat.”

But inauspicious nomenclature didn't keep epazote down! It's an indispensable ingredient in many Central American dishes.

Native to Central and South America, epazote is a hearty plant that prefers full sun. It can be found growing wild in parks, gardens, and roadsides in many climates and regions, including our own here in New York State.

As a flavoring for food, epazote can be overwhelming in large quantities — but used sparingly, it provides an astringent edge that can't be replicated to beans, sauces, and other savory dishes. It doesn't stand up well to heat, so it's usually added to dishes near the end of their cooking times.

Some people attribute medicinal properties to epazote as well. Historically, it's been used as a treatment for hookworms — earning it the nickname “wormwood” — and it's often cooked with beans because it's thought to reduce gas.

Epazote can be eaten fresh or dried. One teaspoon of dried epazote is the approximate equivalent of one leafy fresh sprig.



**Croton
Free
Library**

**All books listed here are available to check out
from the Westchester Library System!**

Our sources:

- Epazote (*Dysphania ambrosioides*) from UIC Heritage Garden: heritagegarden.uic.edu/epazote
- *The History and Natural History of Spices* by Ian Anderson
- *Northeast Foraging* by Leda Meredith
- *The Oxford Companion to Foods* by Alan Davidson
- “What Is Epazote?” from The Spruce Eats: thespruceeats.com/what-is-epazote-4126810

The recipes in this kit are:

- Frijoles Negros from *L.A.’s Original Farmers Market Cookbook* by JoAnn Cianciulli (p. 30-1)
- Tamales de Rajas from *La Comida del Barrio* by Aarón Sánchez (p. 84-5)

See our cookbook collection for additional info & recipes, like:

- Black Beans from *L.A. Mexicano* by Bill Esparza (p.24-5)
- Simmered Shaved Corn with Chiles and Epazote from *Mexican Today* by Pati Jinich (p. 251)

What did you make with your
epazote?

Post it on social media with the hashtag
#CrotonSpiceClub and tag us, or send a photo &
description to ref@crotonfreelibrary.org!

Epazote purchased from Penzey’s Spices.