



## CHICORY

*Chicorium intybus*



### Family:

Asteraceae

### Common Names:

Succory, watcher of the road, blue dandelion, Belgian Witloof, endive.

### Description

Chicory is a half - hardy perennial. In the first year it stays as a low rosette. In the second year in spring it grows a tall flowering stem that will get between 1 – 1.5m that has twig like branches. Chicory has a clear blue flower, with fluted petals. There will be 2 – 3 flowers at each leaf joint. It continually flowers from midsummer to mid autumn. The stem is hollow with bitter milky juice inside. On the flowering stem, depending on the variety, the leaf can be coarsely toothed or rounded at the base. The leaves at the tip of the stem are smaller and arrow-shaped. Chicory has a large taproot. This is occasionally branching and has bitter milky fluid inside. Though classified as perennial Chicory rarely grows for more than three years in New Zealand.

### Habitat

Chicory grows in sunny open sites in light alkaline soil. Commercially in well cultivated plots it is necessary to dig deeply to encourage good root structure. It is sown in pasture for animal fodder and is often found on road sides and wasteland as the seed is wind borne.

### Cultivate

Sow seed in early summer directly into garden soil. From the different varieties readily available chicory seed can be selected. There are witloof or chicons types, radicchio types for fresh leaf use and other types preferred for root harvest. Witloofs or chicons are dug up after the first year of growth in Autumn. The leaves are cut to 25mm length and 25mm trimmed off roots. These are well buried in trays of sandy compost and watered. Excluded from light the trays can stored in a cellar or garage or covered in plastic and buried to retain dampness. Chicons are ready to eat as blanched heads in 3-4 weeks.

### Uses:

#### Flowers

buds can be pickled and the flower used in salads or as an edible garnish.

#### Leaf

first year plants can be cut and eaten fresh as a salad green. Seedlings can be harvested for fresh leaf.

**Chicon**

use fresh leaves to toss in salads or cooked whole. They can be steamed and braised in butter as a vegetable dish.

**Root**

when young, scraped roots can be boiled and served with Bechamel sauce. Traditionally they are used as a coffee substitute. The thick cultivated roots are dug up, washed, sliced and dried in gentle heat. Then roasted and ground. The powder can be used to make a caffeine free hot drink. Commercially chicory root is used to adulterate instant coffee powder.

**Whole plant**

as a drought tolerant vegetable chicory is increasingly being grown in New Zealand for animal fodder. In conjunction with other herbs it is included in nutritious pasture mixtures.

**Medicinal**

Leaf may be used for jaundice and spleen problems. A poultice soothes inflammation.

Root-infuse dried root to make a tonic, mild laxative and diuretic. A decoction may alleviate gallstones, kidney stones and inflammation of liver or urinary tract.

**Constituents**

The active compounds are inulin, sesquiterpene lactones, vitamins, minerals, fat, mannitol and latex. Fructans have been extracted from chicory roots.

**References:**

Lesley Bremness- The Complete Book of Herbs  
Encyclopedia of Herbs – Deni Bown  
Wikipedia