

*Moringa oleifera*

# Indian Moringa

There are several species of Moringa; the one by far the most commonly cultivated as a crop is *Moringa oleifera*, “Indian Moringa” as opposed to “African Moringa” (tho India has 3 species).

Moringa is the source of that mysterious ingredient often called for in authentic Indian cookbooks: “vegetable drumsticks”. They’re the immature pods of the tree.

The other commonly-eaten part of the tree is the leaf. Moringa is one of the few leafy vegetables that happens to be a tree.

Its claim to fame is its unusually rich nutritional profile. The leaves are a significant source of B vitamins, vitamin C, provitamin A as beta-carotene, vitamin K, manganese, and protein. Although the protein level is modest, it’s high for a leafy green, and it’s good quality. For these reasons, Moringa leaves are often dried and given to lactating mothers in poor countries, so that they can produce milk. Moringa is known as “food of the poor” in the Philipines, but there’s nothing wrong with it; it’s not famine-food.

The raw leaves taste like horseradish, tho not as potent. Cooked, they lose the horseradish taste and just taste like a typical leafy green. Try them sauteed with salt and garlic. It’s a little odd to eat them, because each individual leaflet is rather small, but they’re fairly tasty.

In recent decades, Indian crop breeders have been working furiously with Moringa. The enclosed variety is a dwarf. If Moringa trees are allowed to reach their full height, the branches start getting out of reach. Traditionally, the way of dealing with this was to “coppice” the groves (cut the trees back to the ground, and let them re-shoot). Something else that works is to plant the trees close together so that they’re crowded and have difficulty reaching full size. You will have to do something along these lines to keep the shoots within reach, but the dwarf plants will be easier to manage.

Don’t eat the bark or the roots. It’s been done in the past but those parts are mildly toxic.

The seeds, when crushed in muddy water, have the curious effect of clarifying it. But they won’t render it potable; you still have to boil it.

You should probably soak the seeds for 24 hours before sowing, to rehydrate them. Despite coming from dry climates, Moringa has surprisingly “recalcitrant” seeds, meaning they don’t survive drying out, and they don’t keep long. You need to sow these as soon as possible, preferably before the end of the rainy season.