

SPICE OF THE MONTH

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April's spice is tarragon!

We thought a little dragon might encourage spring to arrive, finally – so this month, we're bringing you *Artemisia dracunculus*, aka “the little dragon,” aka tarragon!

There are a few theories about the origin of how tarragon came to be named after a fearsome, fantastical creature. Some sources report that the spear-like appearance of a tarragon leaf and the tortuous roots of the tarragon plant resemble the tongue and tightly coiled body of a snake or a dragon. Others suggest that the name refers to an ancient belief that tarragon is an antidote to the toxic bites of venomous animals. (For the record: It is not.)

Researchers do agree on other tarragon facts. It originated as a wild plant in the rugged areas around Eastern Europe and Central Asia. By the time tarragon became an important ingredient in French kitchens – adding a green, herbaceous, anise-like flavor to iconic recipes like Bearnaise sauce – it was a more highly cultivated version of the herb it once was. Russian tarragon is known for being bitter and astringent, while the French tarragon we're including in these kits is delicate and lively.

This tarragon is a key component of *fines herbs*, a blend used in French cuisine, and it is frequently steeped in vinegar to be used as a popular base for salad dressings. It is also an amazing addition to chicken, tuna, or potato salads.

Before tarragon made its way to Western Europe around the 16th century, it had a place in traditional medicine as well as cooking. People believed in the therapeutic benefits of tarragon, from aiding with labor and childbirth, to easing heart palpitations, to repelling mosquitos.

**Croton
Free
Library**

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

Our sources:

- *Britannica*: Tarragon Uses & Tastes: [britannica.com/plant/tarragon](https://www.britannica.com/plant/tarragon)
- The Encyclopedia of Herbs, Spices & Flavorings: A Cook's Compendium by Elisabeth Lambert Ortiz
- HerbSociety.org: Tarragon: Quick Facts: herbsociety.org/file_download/inline/bdf4e811-4785-4c76-a1dd-dae8e65e3622
- *The Oxford Companion to Food* by Alan Davidson

The recipes in this kit are:

- Baked Carrots and Fennel in Bechamel from *Recipes from the Root Cellar* by Andrea Chesman (p. 110)
- Mushroom Bonanza Salad from *Salmagundi: A Celebration of Salads from Around the World* by Sally Butcher (p. 145)

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

- Filet Mignon with Tarragon from *My French Kitchen* by Joanne Harris (p. 146)
- Tarragon Vodka & Laika from *Kachka: A Return to Russian Cooking* by Bonnie Frumkin Morales (p. 21)

What did you make with your tarragon?

Post it on social media with the hashtag

#CrotonSpiceClub and tag us,

or send a photo & description to

ref@crotonfreelibrary.org!

Tarragon purchased from My Spice Sage.