

Stevia is an herbaceous perennial shrub or sub-shrub and can be used to sweeten foods and drinks straight from the garden or processed for later use. It's a fantastic addition to your herb garden, whether you grow it in a container or in the ground outdoor.

Stevia is about 200 to 400 times sweeter than table sugar and it has no carbohydrates, calories, or artificial ingredients.

It is in the Asteraceae family, native to Brazil & Paraguay. **Grows** 2' tall and just as wide. Hardiness zone 10 or above, an annual elsewhere, keep indoors during colder months. Full sun to part shade, no known pests or diseases, it likes loamy, rich & well-draining soil. These plants need regular watering. Keep the soil evenly moist, especially when they are small and growing. In their native range, they prefer moist environments, so try to mimic those conditions. In hot areas, mulch will keep the soil moist. Throughout the summer, give plants an extra boost with liquid plant food based on fish emulsion every few weeks. The plant does not require many nutrients, and your fertilizer should not be nitrogen-heavy, as this reduces the sweetness of the leaves.

When using your homegrown stevia, **harvest** just before the plant blooms for the sweetest leaves. For a good harvest, pinch out the buds to prevent the plant from flowering and the leaves from becoming bitter. In the cooler autumn temperatures, the leaves are also the sweetest.

To **dry** the leaves – you will only use the leaves, not the stems – you can tie them in bunches and hang them in a cool, dry area for a few days to dry naturally. Alternatively, place individual leaves on baking paper on a baking tray and oven-bake them at a low temperature (280°F or 138°C) for about 20 minutes until dried.

You can grind the dried leaves into a powder by hand with a pestle and mortar, but a spice grinder works much faster. The powder can be **stored** for up to two years if bottled in clean, sterilized jars.

You can measure sweetness for about an eighth of a teaspoon to 1 teaspoon of granulated sugar.

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