

# ASIAN VEGETABLE AND HERB Guide

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**Amaranth** *Amaranthus tricolor*

English Chinese spinach, edible amaranth  
Chinese een choi  
Bahasa bayam  
Thai phak khom suan  
Vietnamese rau dên  
Greek vliita (green variety)

A mild tasting annual plant, the most common variety having red centred leaves. (There is also a smaller leafed green variety available in summer). It is widely available and cooked in much the same way as spinach. Both its leaves and stalks can be stir-fried. It can also be blanched and seasoned with salt, olive oil and lemon juice as a cooked salad.



**Asian Basil** *Ocimum basilicum*

English Thai basil, sweet basil  
Chinese hsiang tsai  
Bahasa selaseh  
Thai horapa  
Vietnamese rau quế

This is a tropical variety of sweet basil and is recognizable by its purple stems and flower spikes and distinct aniseed perfume. It figures prominently in Thai curries and seafood stir-fries and is added to Vietnamese salads and soups, particularly pho.



**Bitter Melon**  
*Momordica charantia*

English bitter gourd, balsam pear  
Chinese foo gwa  
Bahasa peria  
Thai mara  
Vietnamese mướp đắng, khổ qua

This pale green vegetable covered in warts is eaten when firm and not fully ripe. It is favoured throughout Asia for its body-cooling properties. It is salted or blanched to remove some of its bitterness and stir-fried or braised with meat. It can be stuffed with pork and served in broth, curried, pickled or boiled. Southern Indians salt and dry it. The tender leaves and stems of this vine can be cooked in soup or stir-fried.



**Ceylon Spinach** *Basella alba*

English malabar spinach, slippery vegetable  
Chinese saan choi  
Bahasa remayong,  
Thai phak plang  
Vietnamese móng toi

A tropical vine that can reach a height of 10 metres. Only the leaves and young stems are eaten; they are used in salads, steamed and cooked in soups, in much the same way as spinach. It has a mucilaginous texture like okra, hence its name slippery vegetable.



**Chinese Broccoli**  
*Brassica oleracea var. alboglabra*

English Chinese kale, white flowering broccoli  
Chinese gai lan  
Thai pak khana  
Vietnamese cải rộ

One of the most common Asian vegetables, it is cultivated for its young flowering stems and young leaves. Ideally buy and use while the flower heads are tightly closed. It is most commonly blanched or stir-fried. It is delicious served with oyster sauce.



**Chinese Cabbage**  
*Brassica rapa var. pekinensis*

English Peking cabbage, Napa cabbage  
Chinese wong nga baak  
Japanese hakusai  
Thai phak kwaung tung

Pale green and elongated in shape, this can be used in all the same ways as regular cabbage but it has a milder and sweeter flavour. It can be used raw in coleslaws and shredded for use in soups and stir-fries. The large leaves can also be blanched and stuffed with meat or other fillings.



**Chinese Flowering Cabbage**  
*Brassica rapa var. parachinensis*

English Chinese flowering cabbage  
Chinese choi sum  
Thai pak kwang tung  
Vietnamese cải ngọt

This is the most common of Asian greens. It is sold in bunches with smooth bright green stems and elongated leaves with clusters of yellow flowers. It needs only brief cooking to wilt the leaves and keep the stems firm but tender. Most commonly blanched and served with oyster sauce, it can also be stir-fried or sliced and added to soups.



**Chinese Celery**  
*Apium graveolens var. dulce*

English Chinese celery  
Chinese kun choi  
Bahasa daun saderi  
Thai kuen chai  
Vietnamese cần tàu  
Arabic karfas

Darker in colour and smaller than Western celery, this plant could be mistaken for continental parsley were it not for its strong celery flavour. Its leaves and stalks can be added to meat soups or stir-fries. The leaves are also used together with parsley and mint in many Middle Eastern dishes.



**Chinese Chard**  
*Brassica rapa var. chinensis*

English Chinese white cabbage  
Chinese bok choy  
Thai phakkaat farang  
Vietnamese cải bẹ trắng

This type of bok choy has white stems and dark green leaves just like western chard. It needs careful washing as there is often sand between the bases of the leaves. It can be blanched, stir fried, eaten on its own or added to soups.



**Shanghai Chinese Chard**  
*Brassica rapa var. chinensis*

English Shanghai Chinese chard  
Chinese Shanghai bok choy  
Vietnamese cải thường hải

A pale green, sweet and delicate member of the cabbage family, this is one of the most popular Chinese vegetables, especially in its young form (baby bok choy). It needs careful washing as there is often sand between the bases of the leaves. It can be blanched, stir fried, eaten on its own or added to soups.



**Coriander**  
*Coriandrum sativum*

English coriander, cilantro  
Chinese uen sai  
Thai pak chee  
Vietnamese ngò, mùi

Also known as Chinese parsley or cilantro, the fresh stems and leaves of the coriander plant are widely used to garnish soups, salads and cooked dishes. The root of the plant is cleaned and pounded into Thai flavour bases for soups and stirfries as well as curry pastes. It is an essential herb in Moroccan and Mexican cuisines.



**Curry Leaves**  
*Murraya koenigii*

English Indian curry leaves  
Bahasa daun kari  
Hindi meetha neem  
Sri Lanka karapincha

Dark green tapered leaves growing along a central stem, they have an unmistakable fragrance and are used mainly in South Indian and Sri Lankan dishes. They are usually fried in oil with other spices before adding the other ingredients to the dish.



**Fish plant** *Houttuynia cordata*

English fish plant, fishwort, heart leaf, chameleon plant  
Chinese ji cai  
Thai phak kao thong  
Vietnamese rau dấp cá

This plant has a heart-shaped leaf with a fishy smell and a slightly sour flavour. Eaten raw as part of table salad, it is said to ease stomach cramps and to be especially beneficial for women.



**Galangal** *Alpinia galanga*

English Siamese ginger, galangal, galingale  
Chinese hang dou kou  
Bahasa lengkuas  
Thai kha  
Vietnamese riêng

An aromatic rhizome of the ginger family, galangal should be bought when pink and fresh. Used widely in South East Asia, it is an essential ingredient in Thai curry pastes and Tom Yam soups. It is used with fish in North Vietnam. To store, wrap in paper towel and keep in a plastic bag. Do not refrigerate as this causes it to blacken and become tough and hard to cut.



**Garland Chrysanthemum**  
*Chrysanthemum coronarium*

English chrysanthemum greens, edible chrysanthemum  
Japanese shungiku  
Chinese tong ho  
Vietnamese tần ô, cải cúc

The young leaves may be eaten raw but are usually stir-fried or used as the leafy ingredient in simple soups. They also feature in Japanese sukyaki and clear soups. Cook briefly as they become bitter if overcooked. The flowers of these edible species are dried and infused as an herbal tea.



**Garlic Chives**  
*Allium tuberosum*

English Chinese leek, Chinese chives  
Chinese gau choi  
Thai kuichai  
Vietnamese hẹ lá

Characterised by their flat, garlic-flavoured leaves, these chives are used as a garnish in Vietnamese rice paper rolls, as an addition to soups and to Thai noodle dishes. They are also an essential element in Chinese chive pancakes and omelettes.



**Flowering Garlic Chives**  
*Allium tuberosum*

English flowering Chinese leek, flowering Chinese chives  
Chinese gau choi fah  
Vietnamese hẹ hoa

These are the round, flower bearing stems of the garlic chive plant. They are usually added to stir-fries.



**Ginger** *Zingiber officinale*

English ginger  
Chinese geung  
Bahasa halia  
Thai khing  
Vietnamese gừng

This aromatic tuber is often used with garlic and chilli as a flavour base for fish marinades or shredded together with spring onions and coriander as a garnish for steamed fish. It is also often used as an aromatic element in chicken and meat soups. It can be finely julienned and added raw to salads or sweet dishes and ginger flavoured syrup is poured over silken tofu as a dessert. Ginger juice is obtained by finely grating on a porcelain grater – especially in Japanese recipes.



**Green Mango**  
*Mangifera indica*

English green mango  
Thai mamuang dib  
Vietnamese xoài xanh

Green mango is the unripe fruit of certain varieties of mango – especially the fragrant Thai Nam Doc Mai. It is fragrant and pungently sour. Thinly sliced, it is eaten with salt and chilli throughout South East Asia. It can be shredded and combined with herbs and fresh or dried shrimp, squid or fish and served as a salad.



**Green Papaya** *Carica papaya*

English green papaya  
Chinese muk gwa  
Thai malakour dib  
Vietnamese đu đủ xanh

The large torpedo shaped papaya variety is used unripe, its flesh cut into long shreds and seasoned as a salad vegetable. In North East Thailand and Laos it is pounded and heavily seasoned with chilli, sugar and fish sauce with peanuts, snake beans and tomatoes as an accompaniment to the staple sticky rice. Green papaya can also be pickled with fish or shrimp. When ripe, its flesh is yellow and edible as a fruit although it has a somewhat unpleasant smell. Cantonese use the semi ripe fruit in both sweet and savoury soups.



**Green Radish**  
*Raphanus sativus var. longipinnatus*

English green oriental radish  
Chinese cheng loh baak  
Vietnamese củ cải xanh

A green version of the daikon or white radish, it is used mainly as a soup vegetable.



**Holy Basil** *Ocimum sanctum*

Hindi tulsi  
Thai gaprow

A species of basil native to India where it is considered a holy plant and used in Ayurvedic medicine. It has soft, slightly hairy leaves and either purple or green stems and flowers. It has a distinct clove-like fragrance when it is cooked and is most commonly used stir-fried with chicken, chilli and garlic, crisp fried as a garnish for Thai fishcakes and catfish curry or in certain soups. It is best stored in a plastic bag with a piece of paper towel to absorb moisture. If refrigerated, it becomes black and slimy very quickly.



**Hot Mint** *Polygonum odoratum*

English laksa leaves, Vietnamese mint  
Bahasa daun kesum  
Thai pak phai  
Vietnamese rau răm

Not a true mint, this plant has long, pointed green leaves and distinctive purple markings. It has a pungent flavour and is used as part of the table salad and as a complement to strongly flavoured foods such as preserved duck eggs. It is commonly known as Vietnamese mint having been introduced into the West by Vietnamese communities. It is eaten throughout South East Asia and is essential to Nyonya laksa noodle soup.



**Jicama** *Pachyrhizus erosus*

English jicama, yam bean  
Chinese sa got  
Bahasa bangkuang  
Thai man gao  
Vietnamese củ sắn

A native of South America, the jicama has white, sweet, crisp flesh. It can be eaten raw as a fruit or cooked in the same way as the water chestnut for which it can be substituted. Grated jicama is a traditional ingredient in Nyonya po piah rolls. Use in fruit salads as a crisp substitute for apple or pear as it does not discolour as quickly.



**Kaffir Lime** *Citrus hystrix*

English makrut, kaffir lime  
Bahasa limau purut  
Thai makrut

A highly aromatic member of the citrus family, the kaffir lime has glossy double leaves and bumpy dark green fruit. The grated rind of the fruit is used in most Thai curry pastes. The finely shredded leaves add their exquisite fragrance to salads, soups and curries. Both the leaves and fruit can be frozen in a tightly sealed container. It is most often known by its Thai name makrut, as kaffir is a derogatory term for unbeliever in Arabic.

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**La Lot** *Piper sarmentosum*

English wild betel  
Bahasa daun kadok  
Thai bai chaplu  
Vietnamese lá lốt

These deeply veined, shiny, heart shaped leaves are used raw or cooked. The Thais wrap them around sweet coconut and sugar paste with pieces of chilli, roasted coconut and peanuts, dried shrimp, lime and shallots. The Vietnamese wrap them around beef seasoned with lemongrass and grill them. They are sometimes shredded and cooked in soups or made into a drink to combat fever.



**Lemon Grass**

*Cymbopogon citratus*  
English lemon grass  
Chinese heong mau  
Bahasa serai  
Thai takrai  
Vietnamese sả

This grass-like herb is easy to grow in temperate and tropical climates and is an essential flavour in South East Asian cooking. It is commonly found in Vietnamese dishes stir-fried with garlic and chilli. It is also chopped finely and added to many marinades as well as curry pastes and soups.



**Long Coriander**

*Eryngium foetidum*  
English long coriander,  
saw leaf herb, culantro  
Thai pak chee farang  
Vietnamese ngò gai, mùi tàu

This herb, native to the Caribbean Islands but now found throughout Central America and South East Asia has an exquisite aroma akin to that of coriander. It is used as a garnish for Vietnamese soups and may also be shredded as a garnish for cooked dishes and salads, especially the Northern Thai and Lao larbs.



**Lotus Root** *Nelumbo nucifera*

English lotus root  
Chinese lin, leen ngau, lianou  
Bahasa ubi teratai  
Thai rak bua  
Vietnamese củ sen

The rhizome of the royal lotus, it is sold in joined links, looking a little like sausages. It has a sweet taste and crisp texture, which is maintained when cooked. The rhizome has hollow areas so that when it is sliced, it reveals a lace like pattern. Lotus roots are generally blanched to avoid discolouration before being stir-fried, steamed, braised or sautéed. When eaten raw, they provide a somewhat fibrous texture. They can also be candied like the seeds of the same plant.



**Bamboo Mustard Green**

*Brassica juncea var. foliosa*  
English leaf mustard,  
bamboo mustard  
Chinese chuk gaii chui

This leafy green has a strong mustard flavour. If stirfrying, it should first be parboiled. It can then be stir fried with meat or chicken or on its own with oyster sauce.



**Swatow Mustard Green**

*Brassica juncea var. rugosa*  
English swatow mustard  
cabbage  
Chinese daai gaii chui  
Bahasa sawi pahit  
Thai phakkat-khiao  
Vietnamese cải bẹ xanh

This vegetable has large curved leaf stems. It is sometimes used in hot-pot dishes and soups but it is most commonly pickled in brine or in vinegar and eaten as an accompaniment to bland dishes.



**Okra** *Hibiscus esculentus*

English lady's fingers  
Chinese huang qiu kui,  
yong kok dau  
Bahasa bendi  
Thai krachiap  
Vietnamese đậu bắp

A native of Africa, this plant accompanied the slave trade to its destinations. The edible pods are harvested when young and small in size. Over large pods become tough and stringy. When simmered in stews, okra lends a mucilaginous quality to the dish. If they are briefly cooked in soups and curries, they retain their crisp texture. They are also good fried in batter as in tempura.



**Pandanus**

*Pandanus amaryllifolius roxb.*  
English pandan, fragrant  
screwpine  
Bahasa daun pandan  
Thai toei horm  
Vietnamese lá dứa

This spear shaped leaf has a nutty flavour and is used to flavour desserts. When crushed, it can be used as a green colouring agent and is available fresh, frozen, canned or in essence form. The pale green, jellies, cakes and soy drinks in Asian food stores are coloured and flavoured with pandan. Fresh leaves can be knotted and added to cooking oil or steaming sticky rice. They are also wrapped around chicken pieces and grilled.



**Pea Eggplant** *Solanum torvum*

Thai makheua puang  
Vietnamese cà pháo lảo

These pea-sized berries of the nightshade plant grow in clusters and have a slightly bitter taste. They are eaten raw with Thai shrimp and chilli pastes and added to Thai green and jungle curries.



**Pea Shoots** *Pisum sativum*

English pea shoots  
Chinese dau miu  
Thai pak tua lan tao  
Vietnamese đọt sau hòa lan

The young tendrils and leaves of the snow pea plant have a delicate pea flavour. They can be simply blanched or sautéed with oil and garlic or served raw in salads.



**Pennywort** *Centella asiatica*

English Indian pennywort  
Thai bua bok  
Vietnamese rau má

Indian pennywort is a perennial wild creeper with soft kidney shaped leaves. It is reputed to have body-cooling properties and to ease arthritic pain. In Thailand and Vietnam the leaves are blended with sugar syrup and crushed ice to make a refreshing drink. They can also be cooked into simple soups with dried or fresh prawns or eaten raw as part of a salad.



**Perilla** *Perilla frutescens*

English beefsteak plant, shiso  
Chinese gee so, jen  
Japanese shiso (green),  
aka shiso (red)  
Vietnamese tia tồ

Perilla comes in both red and green varieties, the red being more common in Australia. The leaves are rich in calcium and iron and are often found in bunches of mixed herbs in Vietnamese supermarkets. The Japanese use the red variety to colour umeboshi plums and pickled ginger and use the leaves as a garnish or seasoning in their cooking. The Vietnamese use shredded leaves in chicken salads or eat them raw as a fragrant herb or for wrapping grilled meats.



**Rice Paddy Herb**

*Limnophila aromatica*  
English rice paddy herb,  
finger grass  
Thai phak kayaeng  
Vietnamese ngổ om

This tropical aquatic plant has soft, pointy light-green leaves on a fleshy stem. Its fragrance is not unlike that of cummin and it is used as an essential flavouring in Southern Vietnamese sour fish soups and Vietnamese curries.



**Ridged Luffa** *Luffa acutangula*

English angled luffa, ridged  
gourd, Chinese okra  
Chinese sze gwa  
Bahasa petola  
Thai buop Liam  
Vietnamese muóp khia

The fruit of a tropical vine. The long spongy fruit has 10 sharp ridges along its length. It has a mild flavour. To cook, the ridges can be removed with a vegetable peeler and then the gourd can be cut into sections and cooked in soup or curry. It absorbs other flavours and combines well with fatty meats such as duck.



**Shallots**

*Allium cepa var. aggregatum*  
English echalot  
Chinese ts'ung tau  
Thai horm daeng, horm lek  
Vietnamese hành hương

These small red onions have a crisp texture and delicious, mild flavour somewhere between onion and garlic. They can be pounded into flavour bases for soups, marinades and curry pastes, sliced and used fresh in salads or dried and crisp-fried for use as a fragrant garnish, especially for soups or rice crepes. Crisp-fried shallots are available commercially.



**Snake bean**

*Vigna unguiculata subsp. sesquipedalis*  
English long bean, yard long  
bean, snake bean  
Chinese dau gok  
Bahasa kacang panjang  
Thai tua fak yao  
Vietnamese đậu đũa  
Arabic loubia

This long, thin bean has a dry texture and mild bean flavour. Young tender beans are usually cut into short lengths and stir fried. Cut into thin slices they can be added to minced fish, red curry paste and kaffir lime leaves to form Thai fish cakes and also cooked in soups and curries. The long bean figures in Iraqi cuisine.



**Spearmint**

*Mentha viridis, M. spicata*  
English spearmint  
Vietnamese rau húng cai

This hardy perennial plant has slightly crinkled leaves that are more tapered and a lighter shade of green than common mint. It is often included in the mixed bunches of Vietnamese herbs. Spearmint leaves can be infused and used in tea. The oil is also used in confectionery.



**Sponge Luffa** *Luffa cylindrica*

English smooth luffa,  
sponge gourd,  
vegetable/ bonnet gourd  
Chinese seui gua  
Thai buop horm  
Vietnamese muóp hương

Sponge luffa is a tropical running vine. Its fruits are smooth and cylindrical with pale striped skin. Young gourds can be cooked in the same way as zucchini or other marrows. It is mostly grown for its stringy interior which, when dried, forms the well-known luffa body scrubber.



**Sweet Potato** *Ipomoea batatas*

English sweet potato  
Chinese faan sue  
Bahasa ubi keledak  
Thai man thet  
Vietnamese khoai lang

Sweet potato is a perennial vine of the morning glory family native to South America. It is cultivated throughout South East Asia for both its leaves and tuber. Several types are grown with skin color ranging from orange to purple and white. The orange type has fine-grained flesh that is sweet and moist when cooked, similar to pumpkin, while the purple and white varieties have a drier, mealy texture after cooking.



**Taro** *Colocasia esculenta*

English taro, dasheen  
Chinese woo tau  
Bahasa ubi keladi  
Thai peuak  
Vietnamese khoai môn,  
khoai sọ (small variety)

The cream-to-mauve flesh of this starchy root is usually boiled and incorporated into both sweet and savoury dishes. As the skin of the taro contains the toxin, calcium oxalate, it must be peeled before use. A flour is made from dried slices of taro, while the stems of some varieties are added to soups and curries.



**Taro Shoots**

*Colocasia esculenta*  
English taro stems  
Chinese woo hap  
Thai born  
Vietnamese bạch hà

Taro shoots are the stems of certain species of colocasia. The stems and leaves are used in South East Asia and the Caribbean. The stems have an aerated texture and fine skin that should be peeled off before using. They form an essential ingredient in Southern Vietnamese sour fish soup and are also a pleasant addition to Thai green curries.



**Thai Round Eggplant**

*Solanum undatum*  
Thai makheua pro  
Vietnamese cà pháo

Grown in a variety of colours ranging from white through green to purple, these are widely used in Thai and Vietnamese cooking. They are eaten raw with shrimp paste or cut in pieces and added to curries. They are also pickled.



**Turmeric**

*Curcuma domestica, C. longa*  
English turmeric  
Bahasa kunyit  
Thai khamin  
Vietnamese nghệ

A member of the ginger family, turmeric is used in many dishes for both its flavour and bright yellow colour. It is pounded into marinades, especially for fish and is the main colorant in commercial curry powders.



**Water Convolvulus**

*Ipomea aquatica*  
English water spinach,  
swamp cabbage  
Chinese ong choi,  
Bahasa kangkong  
Thai pak boong jin  
Vietnamese rau muống

A member of the morning glory family, it has hollow stems and arrow-shaped leaves. It is stir-fried as a vegetable or added to soups. The shredded stems are used as a garnish with North Vietnamese soups. It is popular all over South East Asia where it is generally stir-fried – with shrimp paste in Malaysia, or chillies and garlic in Thailand.



**White Radish**

*Raphanus sativus*  
English daikon, long white  
radish  
Chinese loh baak,  
Thai hua chai tau  
Vietnamese củ cải trắng

A pungent root commonly found grated raw in Japanese dishes. It is added to salads and often pickled. When cooked in soup stocks and meat stews, it becomes tender and sweet. It is also preserved in salt until it shrinks, turns brown and develops a chewy consistency. It is then washed and cut into small pieces and eaten as a complement to bland rice and noodle dishes.