



Belgian Endive

Interesting Facts

The Belgian endive we eat today is the result of an accident. A Belgian farmer was growing chicory for its root. The root was used as a coffee substitute in Europe. He threw some of these roots into the soft soil of a dark shed and forgot about them. Three weeks later, he found that tight blanching heads had grown. The result has been systematically cultivated since. In BC, Belgian endive is a minor crop, but in Northern Europe, it is a very important winter vegetable.

What is Belgian endive?

Belgian endive, also known as witloof, is a salad green with smooth cream-coloured leaves. It is 10 to 15cm long, compact, slender and has a pointed head.

Where is Belgian endive produced in BC?

It is grown in the Lower Mainland.

How much Belgian endive do we produce?

While witloof is an important vegetable in Europe, it is not a major crop in BC. BC has only one producer.

How is Belgian endive produced?

Seeds are planted in April through June, about 15cm apart. The plants are watered and fertilized throughout the summer. In the late summer and fall, the crop is topped and the roots are dug up. After a cold-storage period, roots are planted in dark forcing chambers and watered with a hydroponic solution. The first harvest can be made about four weeks later.

How is Belgian endive used?

Witloof is used raw in salads or braised and served as a vegetable.

What happens after Belgian endive leaves the farm?

To be stored, witloof must be protected from light, otherwise it will turn green. It is sold to wholesalers, who in turn supply supermarkets and restaurants.

What challenges do Belgian endive producers face?

Witloof production is a very specialized business requiring investment in sophisticated equipment and careful management by the grower. It is a long season crop that must be first grown in the field, then stored for a time and finally forced (which means to artificially hasten the development) before the product is ready for market.

Who's involved in producing Belgian endive?

- Witloof producers
- Seed suppliers
- Fertilizer suppliers
- Equipment dealers



