

# French Tarragon: Fact Sheet

**Common name:** French Tarragon

**Scientific name:** *Artemisia Dracunculus* (French Tarragon), *Artemisia Dracunculoides* (False Tarragon or Russian Tarragon)

**Family:** Compositae

**Uses:** Primarily used as a culinary herb. Tarragon is commonly used to flavour vinegars, herb butters, shellfish, pork, beef, poultry, leeks, potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, onions, asparagus, mushrooms, broccoli, peas, and rice. The fresh leaves are commonly used in salads, tartar sauce, béarnaise sauce and some French dressings. Last but not least, Tarragon is used in “fines herbes” which is a classic Mediterranean / French herb mix that contains fresh parsley, chives, tarragon and chervil.

**History:** There is some ambiguity as to the origins of the word Tarragon. It is commonly thought that the name tarragon is derived from the French word “estdragon”. There are others that believe that the true origins of the name are derived from the Arabic word "tarkhun". Both names translate to “little dragon”.

**Description:** A green shrub has a branched root system with runners that produce erect, bushy, branched stems. The leaves range from lanceolate (shaped like a lance head) to linear (thin, almost straight), and tend to grow 1 to 4 inches.

**Plant type:** Perennial

**Hardiness:** Hardiness zones 4 - 7.

**Height:** 24 to 36 inches. However some growers report plants that grew up to 5 feet high.

**Width:** 24 inches

**Light:** Full Sun is best, but can tolerate small amounts of shade.

**Soil:** Although most species tolerate poor dry soils, results are best if the plants are grown in a fertile, sandy, well-drained loam with a pH of 6.9. Also grows well in soilless peat based mixtures (in containers).

**Pests:** No known pest issues.

**Disease:** Root rot and mildew. Tarragon can tolerate poor dry soils, as well as lack of water. However, it will not tolerate excessively wet roots. When in doubt, grow in containers.

**Propagation:** Plant propagates itself via underground runners. If you need to propagate new plants, do so by taking cuttings of rooted shoots, or by dividing your existing root stock.

- **Cutting Method:** take 6-inch tips of shoots in late spring or summer, when new leaves are fairly firm. Strip the lower leaves and place the stem in a pot of growing medium. Sterile peat moss or sand works well. Once the cuttings are rooted, plant them outside, preferably in mid summer.
- **Plant Division Method.** Using a trowel, or small spade lift out a clump of your tarragon plants. Divide the clump into several smaller clumps of plants. Plant these clumps in new rich soil. The same process may be carried out with potted Tarragon as well.

**Cultivation:** Use cuttings or young plants to start tarragon (see below). Plant seedlings in a sunny area with well-drained soil and keep watered. Cut back in autumn. Plants will die back to the ground in winter. Place grass clippings over the roots in severely cold climates. Plants should be divided every two to three years to ensure vigour as plants will weaken with time.

Tarragon is not completely hardy, so cover the plants with straw, or grass clippings in autumn after the foliage has died down. Place containers in a greenhouse or shed to overwinter.

**Companion planting:** This aromatic herb generally enhances the growth of other plants, including most vegetables.

**Flowering period:** Fall, should be harvested before blooming. Blooming rarely occurs outside very temperate zones. However, if flowering shoots do appear, remove them. This will maintain a supply of fresh leaves on the bush.

**Flower color:** Yellow-green to Greenish white in color. In general, flowers never open properly except in a very warm climate

**Harvesting:** Snip of stems as needed. I tend to cut them off an inch or so above ground level.

**Preservation:** The leaves should be picked from late spring to early fall for immediate use. However, the surplus can be dried, steeped in vinegar or preserved using the ice cube method.

For more details consult our website at <http://www.tarragon.ca>