Parsley
Petroselinum crispum

Parsley (Petroselinum crispum) grows well in Florida gardens. There are three common varieties of this popular, bright green biennial: flat leaf (Italian, with leaves like celery and cilantro), curly leaf, and parsnip root (Hamburg). It is quite nutritious, containing vitamin A, vitamin C, several B vitamins, calcium, and iron.

Although a hardy biennial, parsley performs best as an annual. It overwinters in plant zones 2 through 7, with plants flowering and setting seed in the second year. It is a cool season vegetable, best planted in late fall or winter in North Florida. It is fairly hard to transplant, so seeds should be sown where you want them to grow. Plant thickly ¼ inch deep: then thin seedlings to 6 inches apart.

Parsley tolerates full sun, but would like some afternoon shade in hotter regions of the South. To harvest, cut leaves back to the crown, or cut the whole plant down to 2 inches above ground. Italian parsley is prized by gourmets as the most flavorful of all parsleys. Parsley works well with most foods except sweets. Use the leaves in cooking or as a garnish.

Parsley is also one of many host plants providing food for caterpillars and luring female butterflies into the garden to lay eggs. Many butterflies are particular about which host plant they will use. The Black Swallowtail, a.k.a., Parsnip Swallowtail, Eastern Black Swallowtail, and Parsley Worm, will lay her eggs on virtually any member of the carrot family (Apiaceae), wild or cultivated, which includes favorites such as Parsley, Dill and Fennel (Foeniculum spp.). The caterpillars are almost always found near the small flowers of the plant. They prefer eating the flowers or young seeds. This species spends the winter in the pupal stage, but may be seen flying as early as the end of April and as late as the end of October.