

## Stevia

### Stevia Rebaudiana

Family: Asteraceae

#### Description

Stevia is a tender perennial shrub that grows up to 30cm high with light hairy narrow pointed leaves up to 8cm long with a serrated edge and light venation, growing evenly along the stem. A group of tiny white star-shaped flowers form at the tip of the stem throughout the season.

#### Growing Tips

It likes plenty of sun and a light sandy soil with constant moisture but not too much watering. Place some mulch around the plant in summer to avoid drying out of the roots as they are quite shallow. Slow release nitrogen and potash fertilizer will enhance growth. For best results protect from frosts and water sparingly in winter. Harvest leaves and stems in autumn, sweetness is at its best before frost sets in. It's also suitable for growing in containers - choose a sunny position and plant at 15cm intervals.

#### Parts Used

Leaves

#### Uses

Stevia has a sweetening effect 30-45 times that of normal sugar but without calories, and is therefore widely used as a sweetener. The leaf can be dried and ground and added to food or made as a tea. It has no effect on insulin activity and is being considered valuable in the control of diabetes and high blood pressure. It is available in health food stores as a dry plant or extract.

#### Origin & History

Stevia is native to South America and grows in Mexico and the West coast of North America, and has been used in Paraguay and Brazil as a sweetener and for heartburn for over 1500 years.

Its Guarani name is Ka'a Hé'é - Sweet Herb. It was discovered by a Spanish botanist and physician Pedro Jaime Esteve who gave it its name.

The descriptive rebaudiana was derived from the scientist who first extracted the stevioside from the plant, Rebaudi.

Intense research throughout the world has made this herb an important substitute for sugar and other sweeteners and in Japan it constitutes 40% of the country's sugar.

