

Arrugula —*Eruca sativa* Mill.¹

James M. Stephens²

Arrugula (arugula) is also known as roquette, true rocket, rocket salad, tira, and in England as white pepper. The name “rocket” derives from the French roquette, a diminutive form of the Latin *eruca*, the Italian *rucetta*, and medieval French Provençal *roqueto*. While the vegetable was most commonly known as roquette for many years, the term “arrugula” appears more often now, at least in Florida.



Figure 1.

DESCRIPTION

Arrugula is a low growing, 8-24 inches, annual with dull green, deeply cut, compound leaves. The edible leaves are

characterized by a distinctive spicy, pungent flavor resembling horseradish.

USE

The plant belongs to the Cruciferae family and is a close relative of the mustards. Its zesty leaves are used in a young tender stage in salads and sometimes cooked as a potherb. The plant was spoken of by early writers as a good salad herb, but should not be eaten alone. Ancient Egyptians and Romans both have considered the leaves in salads to be an aphrodisiac.

CULTURE

Arrugula is a very minor crop in the United States. In Florida, it is grown to a limited extent commercially and in home vegetable gardens where it seems to do quite well. Seeds often are listed in seed company catalogs usually as roquette under the category of herbs.

It is a cool season vegetable plant best grown in Florida during the same season as radishes: fall, winter, and spring. It matures from seed in 2 to 3 months. Periods of very warm temperatures cause it to bolt (go to seed) rather quickly.

In the garden, thin seedling plants to 3 to 4 inches apart in rows 12 inches apart. Apply fertilizer and follow recommended practices for commonly grown vegetables. Few pests will bother roquette, perhaps because of its pungency.

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HARVESTING AND USE

Harvest leaves a few at the time so that others will continue to sprout from the main stalk. Use leaves when young and tender. Pick individually when 2 to 3 inches long, or cut several at the soil line. When blooming commences, leaves get bitter, but the blooms may be eaten in salads.