

Radicchio Factsheet and Resources

Summary

Chicory (*Cichorium* spp.) was first domesticated in the Middle East and the Balkans, eventually moving to the Mediterranean basin and northward into Europe where it diversified. The focus of this fact sheet is on salad chicories (c. *intybus*), specifically Radicchio, Belgium/Witloof chicory, Pain de sucre, , and Catalogne (Puntarelle). Salad chicories are the same species as common chicory root (used for medicinal and industrial purposes), but different from curly endive and escarole (c. *endivia*).¹

Radicchio varieties were introduced to northern Italy in the 15th century. The Red Late Treviso was the first cultivated radicchio in the area around Venice¹. This original ancestor underwent repeated selection for appearance, including selecting for loose-leaf or heavier, dense heads; variegations of color; and performance in different environmental conditions, with early and late maturing varieties being developed for each type. A strong cultural association between each type of radicchio and specific regions remains.

Since radicchios were introduced in North America, they have attracted an increasing following of consumers and chefs, who enjoy the diversity of shapes, colors, and textures, as well as bitter and floral tastes. The Chioggia types are the most well known radicchios outside of Italy, having demonstrated great adaptability to very different environmental situations worldwide¹. The culinary use of radicchios is increasing, with more know-how circulating on how to prepare these highly nutritious bitter lettuces in the kitchen.

Most modern varieties are the result of open-pollinated, farm-saved seeds selected from variable gene pools known as landraces selected for greater uniformity to increase predictability and acceptance by farmers. Farmers have adopted radicchios as a way to supply the market with out-of-season substitutes for lettuces and because these crops have superior cold tolerance to withstand up to -10 C in the field or under a tunnel. There is little information on the crop's adaptation to Canada's latitudes. Coastal regions should be able to produce both early and late maturing varieties, whereas other regions are limited to the former.

Radicchios are biennials and are characterized by a strong self-incompatibility system, which has been considered a barrier for obtaining inbred lines for the development of hybrid varieties¹. However, there is also very little information available on how the crop has adapted to produce seed in Canada's latitudes. Seed producers will need to consider best strategies to vernalize the crop and harvest seed frequently, given the variability of flowering and maturation present in certain open-pollinated varieties².

¹ Barcaccia, G., et al. (2016). Current Advances in Genomics and Breeding of Leaf Chicory (*Cichorium intybus* L.). *Agriculture*. <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-0472/6/4/50>

² Navazio, J. (2012) *The Organic Seed Grower*, 126-133.

For more information:

- [Varietal Groups of Radicchio and Chicory](#)
- CANOVI Radicchio [Variety Trial Protocol](#) and [Evaluation Sheet](#)
- Podcast Episodes on Culinary Breeding with Lane Selman ([here](#) and [here](#))
- [Instructional Radicchio Cooking Video- Trailer](#)
- [Instructional Radicchio Cooking Video- Full length](#)
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