

***Stevia rebaudiana*: Sweet Herb of Paraguay**

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Here's an herb that's 300 times sweeter than sugar. Stevia is a natural sweetener that offers several health advantages: it contains zero calories, does not raise blood glucose levels, and does not promote cavities.

Often grown as an annual in our zone 7 climate, it also flourishes in a sunny window as a houseplant. Prune back your stevia plant a few times throughout the growing season to prevent flowering and to encourage branching. Stevia is a miraculous beverage enhancer. Just drop a fresh or dried leaf or two into your favorite concoction. Otherwise, use this easy-to-make liquid extract made with fresh (or dried) stevia leaves and vodka.

Wash the leaves and coarsely chop them. (if using fresh). Place the leaves into a clean, glass jar. Fill the jar with vodka, making sure the leaves are completely covered.

Place the lid on securely, give it a good shake, and set it aside. Let the leaves steep in the vodka for around 48 hours. If you let it sit longer, the resulting extract will be bitter. Strain the leaves from the vodka. Pour the extract into a small saucepan and heat for 20 minutes. Do not let it boil. Heating will remove alcohol and improve sweetness. It will also thicken up a bit and reduce in volume. Pour your finished extract into a small bottle and refrigerate. It should last several months.

For use in baking, finely grind dried leaves. One teaspoon replaces 1 cup of sugar.



Photo by Uwanna Thomas

References:

Winger, J. (2014). How to Make Stevia Extract, The Prairie Homestead, Last updated 2019.

<https://www.theprairiehomestead.com/2014/08/homemade-stevia-extract.html>