

## Hate Cilantro? Blame Your Genes

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New research indicates that your love (or hate) for cilantro depends on your genes. (Photo credit: Marnie Burkhardt/Fancy/Alamy Images)

When it comes to the taste of cilantro in a spicy bowl of soup or wrapped up in a burrito, where do you stand? Do you find its taste refreshing? Or does it seem like you're eating a mouthful of soap? This seemingly-benign herb elicits a love-hate relationship for many people. New research indicates that your genes may dictate your initial reaction to the flavor of this green herb.

*Coriandrum sativum*, or cilantro (also called coriander), leaves are used to season foods from around the world. Though most common in South Asian and Latin American cuisines, history indicates that this plant has been cultivated since at least 1500 BCE. The plant itself is native to the eastern Mediterranean region and its leaves and seeds have been used as ingredients in European kitchens since the Middle Ages.

However, somewhere around 1600, cilantro fell out of favor with Europeans, and writings from that time period disparage the herb's taste. Fast-forward to modern times, and the taste of this herb remains controversial. Today you can find an [I Hate](#)

[Cilantro Facebook page](#) and a [blog dedicated to the hatred of cilantro](#), which includes an entire section of haiku poems ridiculing the green plant's taste. Even Julia Child was a cilantro-hater. When asked if she would ever order it, she replied I would pick it out if I saw it and throw it on the floor.

Cilantro's scent and flavor are attributed to various aldehydes, which are a class of highly-reactive organic compounds. The odor of these aldehydes is described as being fruity, green, pungent, and soapy.

Research published earlier this year in the journal *Flavour* indicates that the lowest proportion of cilantro-haters are found among those with a Middle Eastern, South Asian, or Hispanic heritage. This information is not surprising, as these are the cultures that use cilantro the most in their cuisine, and so they have frequent exposure to the herb's flavor. In contrast, those with an East Asian or Caucasian background are more likely to despise the taste of cilantro. So, it seems there's good evidence to suggest that a love (or hate) of cilantro is in your genes. And that's exactly what some researchers are attempting to find out for sure.

[23andMe, Inc.](#) is a private company that provides individuals with the ability to obtain their genetic information. This data can be used by individuals for such things as tracing their ancestry and determining their risk for certain diseases. In addition, individuals can opt in to allow their genetic information to be used in research studies and participate in surveys used to further understand the human genome.

One such recently-conducted survey focused on participants' preference for cilantro. Of the 25,000 individuals of European descent questioned, 14,604 participants described cilantro's taste as soapy, while 11,851 participants responded that they liked the taste of cilantro. Further investigation into the individual participants' genomes implicated a cluster of olfactory receptor genes on chromosome 11 that determine a person's preference for this green herb.

This research confirms findings from a previous study involving twins. The study, published in the journal *Chemical Senses*, found that there was a strong heritability for cilantro preference. Research indicated that 80 percent of identical twins shared the same preference for cilantro, while fraternal twins shared the same preference for the herb less than 50 percent of the time. The scientists were able to identify three genes that influence an individual's perception of cilantro. One of these genes is associated with the detection of pungent compounds and two of the genes are associated with the detection of bitter-tasting compounds.

So, whether you love the taste of cilantro or hate it, you now know that you can place a good portion of the gratitude (or blame) on your genes. But, if you'd like to expand your palate (and not feel like you're washing your mouth out with soap each time you eat a sprig of cilantro), consider using the leaves in a pesto recipe. A Japanese study published in 2010 indicates that crushing the leaves releases the enzymes that give the herb its soapy flavor, leading to a more mild taste.

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[Cilantro Haters, It's Not Your Fault](#)

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