



Cantabria:

vegetables that lend flavour to traditional cooking



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Fruit and vegetable growing in Cantabria is a minor activity compared to livestock farming, but the region does produce vegetables and pulses of some importance, like beans, runner beans, tomatoes, peppers, onions, lettuces, leeks, cabbage of various kinds, cauliflower and chard.

The carico montañés is a high-quality red bean, with a fine, firm skin and a smooth, protein-rich albumen, which on cooking thickens the surrounding stock without need of animal fat. Caricos are traditionally grown to supplement farmers' income alongside other crop and livestock farming activities.

Another standout crop is Liébana red onion, grown in the valleys of Liébana. This onion variety has a globe-like bulb; the outer layers of skin are a reddish purple when dry. The flesh is very compact





and slightly pink-tinted. Its flavour strikes a balance of sweetness and acidity, and is a real explosion of taste in the mouth. Liébana red onion is great eaten raw in a salad, and also makes a good cooking onion.

Arnuero is home to the pimiento de Isla, a traditional red pepper variety native to Cantabria with great flavour and pulpy flesh. Other interesting pepper varieties in the region include pimiento choricero and pimiento de asta. Pimiento choricero is an Italian-style sweet pepper. It can be fried when green and, once ripe, it turns red and is kept through the autumn and winter. Pimiento choricero is used as a condiment for *carico montañés* stews and other traditional dishes of Cantabrian cookery. Pimiento de asta is mostly used for roasting, although it can also be chopped into strips and fried.

The soil and climate conditions of Cantabria are ideal for growing tomatoes of wonderful appearance and savour. The tomatoes here come under a *Calidad Controlada* (controlled quality) mark. The quality of Cantabria tomatoes – which are eaten fresh – is evident in their uniform size and shape, their predominantly orange-coloured pulp, with a firm texture and inner appearance, and a flavour that balances acids and sugars. The tomatoes are grown outdoors and in conventional and hydroponic greenhouses.

These cultivation methods are also used to grow lettuce, leek, chard and brassicas like cabbage and Savoy cabbage. Cabbage – known locally as *berza* – is one of Cantabria's most traditional crops and a time-honoured ingredient in *montañés* cookery. *Berza*, with the white *alubia* bean and the typical *chon* pork products, is one of the basic ingredients of *cocido montañés*, a hearty bean stew.

Cantabria's main fruits are apple, pear, kiwi, walnut and hazelnut.

Apples are distributed wholesale in small consignments of 500 to 1,000 kg to *renovero* dealers in local markets. But most sales are made to the Asturian cider industry, which takes in both cider apples proper and old and new varieties of table apples. Recently, new plantations tend to focus on Asturian cider apple varieties.

The most recent pear orchard plantations grow *Conferencia* and *Decana de Comicio* pear varieties. Pears are also partly distributed in small consignments bought by *renovero* dealers.

Kiwis, grown mainly in the *Novales-Cóbreces* area, are distributed at the regional level, mostly in the tourist sector (restaurants, bars, typical produce shops, etc.).

