



## **STEVIA REBAUDIANA** also called **SUGAR PLANT\_**

- Native to South America where it has been used as a natural sweetener for centuries
- Was only approved for import into U.S. by FDA a few years ago
- Is considered a “weak” perennial, but will tolerate very light frost if well established
- Plant when soil temperatures >55°F
- Plants should be spaced about 18 inches apart
- Do not plant stevia in an area that gets hot scorching afternoon sun, best in areas with some afternoon shade
- Prefers rich soil with compost incorporated
- Root system is shallow and needs to be kept moist
- Use mulch around plant to keep roots cool and moist
- Use fertilizer very lightly if needed, mainly nitrogen but only low rates
- Stevia may be susceptible to a disease called Sclerotinia, lesions on stems where branches just wilt and collapse. Just take off branch, plant usually recovers.
- Try not to sprinkle top of plant when watering, point nozzle towards root zone, more likely to get diseases when the entire plant gets wet each time it is watered
- Stevia leaves contain about 12% stevioside, the compound responsible for sweetness
- To dry or dehydrate, pick leaves in late summer or early fall when stevioside is highest
- After the leaves are dry, they can be ground in a coffee grinder
- Dried stevia may be used like sugar, sprinkled over cereal or other foods
- Stevia leaves may be also be chopped up fresh, put into boiling or simmering water for 20 minutes, strain the and you will have a sweetened liquid
- Use this sweetened liquid to make ice tea or use as a liquid sweetener

