

Aethusa cynapium

[Synonyms : *Aethusa cynapium* subsp. *cynapium*]

FOOL'S PARSLEY is an annual to perennial. Native to western Asia, North Africa and Europe (including Britain) it has frothy heads of small white flowers.

It is also known as Ass's parsley, Cicely, Cow parsley, Devil's wand, Dog parsley, Dog poison, Dog's parsley, *Éthuse* (French), False parsley, Folly, Fool's-cicely, Garden hemlock, *Gartenschierling* (German), *Geuberllys* (Welsh), *Hondspeterselie* (Dutch), *Hundspetersilie* (German), Kelk, *Koiso* (Finnish), Lace curtains, Lesser hemlock, *Persli'r Ffŵyl* (Welsh), Pig dock, *P'tite chue* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Small hemlock, Smaller hemlock, *Tetlucha kozí pysk* (Czech), *Tue-lapin* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), and *Vildpersilja* (Swedish); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of silliness.

The plant emits a repulsive odour which intensifies when bruised.

Warning – the whole fresh plant is extremely poisonous. It can cause salivation, nausea, diarrhoea, headache, muscular tremors, stiffness of limbs, pain, confusion of vision, inco-ordination, vomiting and death. It is poisonous for animals which normally avoid the fresh plant because of the smell. The dried plant is harmless.

Fool's parsley's leaves can be confused with those of garden parsley (the flat leaved variety of *Petroselinum crispum*) but the former are a darker green and have an unpleasant smell . When in flower fool's parsley has three long, slender leaves (bracts) hanging from the base of the flower heads. The poisonous roots of fool's parsley can be confused with those of the non-poisonous American sweet cicely (*Osmorhiza longistylis*), horseradish (*Armoracia rusticana*), turnip (*Brassica rapa*), garden radish (*Raphanus sativus*) and parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*), and also the poisonous roots of monk's-hood (*Aconitum napellus*), of beaver poison (*Cicuta maculata*), of hemlock water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*), of hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), of pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*), and of white bryony (*Bryonia dioica*).

It was known to 16th Century apothecaries as *Apium rusticum*.

Medicinally, although fool's parsley is now recognized as being most poisonous, the plant used to be recommended for treating children's gastro-intestinal ailments, as well as convulsions and Summer diarrhoea.