

Apium graveolens

[Synonyms : *Apium graveolum*, *Apium integrifolium*, *Apium vulgare*, *Carum graveolens*, *Celeri graveolens*, *Selinum graveolens*, *Seseli graveolens*, *Sium apium*, *Sium graveolens*]

WILD CELERY is a biennial or perennial. Native to western Europe (including the British Isles), it has tiny greyish- or greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as *Accio* (Italian), *Ach*, *Ache* (English, French), *Ache des marais* (French), *Aipo* (Portuguese), *Ajamoda* (Gujarati, Sanskrit), *Ajmod* (Tamil, Urdu), *Ajmoda* (Marathi, Sanskrit), *Ajumoda* (Telugu), *Apio* (Spanish), *Apio borde* (Spanish), *Apio de agua* (Spanish), *Api* (Catalan, Spanish), *Appio* (Italian), *Apyum*, *Arche* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Bari ajmud* (Hindi), *Bladselderij* (Dutch), *Bleichsellerie* (German), *Blekselleri* (Swedish), *Bodi ajamoda* (Gujarati), *Celer* (Croatian, Czech), *Céleri* (French), *Celerio* (Esperanto), *Céléri sauvage* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Celery*, *Celery seed*, *Cellerie* (German), *Ch'in* (Chinese), *Daun sop* (Malay), *Echter Sellerie* (German), *Eppich* (German), *Groene selder* (Dutch), *Hageselleri* (Norwegian), *Karafs* (Arabic, Persian), *Karfus* (Maltese), *Karpass rihani* (Hebrew), *Kereviz* (Turkish), *Kerfes rihani* (Hebrew), *Khuen chai* (Thai), *Knollensellerie* (German), *Lakhod garos* (Armenian), *Marsh parsley*, *Mers* (Welsh), *Miřik celer* (Czech), *Oranda mitsuba* (Japanese), *Phak khao puen* (Thai), *Phak puen* (Thai), *Phak puen* (Thai), *Qin* (Chinese), *Ruokaselleri* (Finnish), *Salary*, *Sedano* (Italian), *Sedano comune* (Italian), *Sel'derei* (Russian), *Selderij* (Dutch), *Seleno* (Italian), *Seler* (Polish), *Selery zwyczajne* (Polish), *Sèlinon* (Greek), *Selleri* (Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish), *Sellerie* (German), *Serorli* (Japanese), *Small ache*, *Smallage*, *Strandselleri* (Danish), *Sweet parsley*, *Syel'derey* (Russian), *Venus herb*, *Vild selleri* (Danish), *Zelena* (Slovenian), *Zelerové semená* (Slovakian), and *Zeller* (Hungarian).

Juice is extracted commercially from leaves and roots. Oil of celery is extracted from the seeds. The seeds are also combined with salt to provide the retailed 'celery salt' (which contains 10-25% ground seed).

Warning – an overdose can cause a miscarriage. The plant may be unsuitable for those suffering from heart disease or high blood pressure. Prolonged handling of mouldy or bruised celery can cause photosensitivity on exposed skin.

Wild celery's leaves have been confused with those of the very poisonous hemlock water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*) and of celery-leaved buttercup (*Ranunculus sceleratus*).

Graveolens is derived from Latin *gravis* (heavy, weighty) and *oleo* (to emit an odour, smell) components meaning 'strong-smelling or heavily-scented'.

Most authorities seem to believe that wild celery is a native of the Mediterranean area and the name of one town in Sicily, Selinunte, is actually derived from the plant's Greek name *sèlinon*.

In the protected marshland areas Egyptians as far back as about 2200 BC were harvesting wild celery. When archaeologists examined the tomb of Tut'ankhamun (the young Egyptian boy-king who ruled Egypt for 6 years before his death in c. 1340 BC) they found wild celery leaves depicted in one of the semi-circular garlands adorning the coffin breast.

For the ancient Greeks wild celery was not only a medicinal plant (or seasoning for food) but it also attracted sufficient respect to be included in both funeral wreaths and garlands (the

latter bestowed upon athletes). It also makes an appearance in *The Odyssey* written by the 8th Century BC Greek poet, Homer.

The Romans used it as smelling salts, and according to some added it to soups and fish dishes as a flavouring (they preferred to eat the wild plant rather than the cultivated version, *Apium graveolens* var. *dulce*). There are authorities that have suggested that wild celery only acquired a role as a table vegetable in the Middle Ages. By that time in Europe it had also gained a certain amount of fame amongst some gastronomic writers as an aphrodisiac, a reputation that was to persist for several hundred years. It is thought that the plant was introduced to Britain during the 16th Century Elizabethan era and was welcomed there in its reputed aphrodisiac capacity.

One other role of Medieval times was connected with witchcraft. Adherents put seeds in their shoes so that they could fly.

It should be noted however that it is much more bitter in taste than cultivated celery (*Apium graveolens* var. *dulce*). Celery seeds (fruit of the wild celery) are understood to be one of the tiniest seeds used in the kitchen as flavouring. This is dramatically illustrated from the reported fact that it takes about 760,000 'seeds' to make up 1 lb. in weight. Wild celery is said to contain a hormone that has a similar effect to that of insulin.

The plant has long been familiar in China although authorities seem to refer to its use there only from the 5th Century. The Chinese, who apparently enjoy a more bitter flavour, tend to eat their thinner juicier varieties unblanched (unlike some countries in the West) as a cooked vegetable.

Wild celery is found in North America and records describe how the Cahuilla Indian tribe of southern California used it as a flavouring for soups and stews, while the Luiseño (also from the same region) prepared it as a green vegetable. It is understood that in Louisiana the Houma tribe used the plant in a remedy for tuberculosis.

In the West today wild celery is used quite widely on a commercial scale. Oil of celery offers a flavouring for the drinks industry in liqueurs and tonics. And it is also used by the perfumery and toiletry industries (the latter especially in soap).

Medicinally, during the Middle Ages Western Europe particularly used wild celery to treat arthritis and acid indigestion. It then came to be a part of recommended treatment for liver ailments, bronchitis, feverish conditions, loss of appetite, rheumatism and excessive weight. In the 19th Century the American Quakers used the plant as an ingredient in their medicines. Chinese clinical studies have confirmed its value in the treatment of some nervous disorders Today wild celery is used commercially in homoeopathic treatments.