

Apium graveolens var. *dulce*

[Synonyms : *Apium dulce*, *Apium graveolens*, *Celeri graveolens*]

CELERY is a biennial variety (grown as an annual). It has tiny greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as *Ache des marais* (French), *Ache douce* (French), *Ache odorante* (French), *Aipo* (Portuguese), *Ajmod* (Urdu), *Ajmud* (Hindi), *Apio* (Spanish), *Apio borde* (Spanish), *Apio tradicional* (Spanish), *Bladselderij* (Dutch), *Bladselleri* (Danish, Swedish), *Blanching celery*, *Blegselleri* (Danish), *Bleich-Sellerie* (German), *Céleri* (French), *Céleri à blanchir* (French), *Céleri branche* (French), *Chereshkovyi sel'derei* (Russian), *Eppe* (Dutch), *Fan qin cai* (Chinese), *Garden celery*, *Han qin* (Chinese), *Juffrouwmerk* (Dutch), *Kalafs* (Persian), *Krafus* (Arabic), *Lehtiselleri* (Finnish), *Oranda mitsuba* (Japanese), *Ruokaselleri* (Finnish), *Saladri* (Sundanese), *Selderie* (Dutch), *Selderi* (Malay), *Selderij* (Dutch), *Seldry* (Singhalese), *Sigh kun* (Chinese), *Snijselderij* (Dutch), *Stangensellerie* (German), *Staudensellerie* (German), *Stiel-Sellerie* (German), *Stilkselleri* (Norwegian), *Struikselderij* (Dutch), *Tang ô* (Thai), and *Xi qin* (Chinese).

Oil of celery is extracted from the seeds and like the seeds themselves is used as a food flavouring. The dried seeds are also used to make celery salt.

Warning – prolonged contact with the plant can cause dermatitis.

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

The cultivated varieties derived from wild celery began to be developed in the 16th Century by Italian gardeners (initially on the plain of the River Po) – and in the following Century credit must be given to the French Sun King’s famous agronomist (in actuality he was trained as a lawyer), Jean-Baptiste de la Quintinie (1624-1691), who contributed further to celery’s improvement. In 1623 it had become a traditional seasoning for French meats, soups and stews – although it is said to have been cultivated in France ‘officially’ only from 1641 in the royal gardens in Paris. (Unofficially however records show that the French were cultivating celery in the 15th Century.). By the middle of that Century it was being eaten raw in Italy and France, in the latter with an oil dressing. The dressed celery turned out to be useful for many Christians who believed that it conformed to the fasting rules that had to be kept during Lent. The roots are one of the ingredients – with those of butcher’s-broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*), garden parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*), fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare* var. *dulce*) and garden asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*) – in a celebrated liqueur called Five Roots Liqueur.

At the end of the 17th Century cultivated celery (grown covered up or ‘blanched’ to make the stalks whiter and milder tasting) was introduced to England. At this stage however cultivated celery still bore only a passing resemblance to that enjoyed today. It took persistent development over the intervening centuries (not least in Utah in the United States) to obtain the relatively stringless thicker, crunchy, juicy variety familiar to modern cooks. Apart from the vegetable, the ground dried seeds are also used today in celery salt prepared on a commercial scale.

The seed oil has been used in perfumery.

Medicinally, herbalists have recommended the seeds as a tonic, and to enhance digestion, ease

rheumatism and control periods.