

Armoracia rusticana

[Synonyms : *Amoracia lapathifolia*, *Armoracia armoracia*, *Armoracia lapathifolia*, *Armoracia sativa*, *Armoratia rusticana*, *Cochlearia armoracia*, *Cochlearia rusticana*, *Nasturtium armoracia*, *Radicula armoracia*, *Rorippa armoracia*]

HORSERADISH is a perennial. Native to western Asia and south-eastern Europe it has small, aromatic yellowish-white flowers.

It is also known as *Armoracio kampakara* (Esperanto), *Barbaforte* (Italian), *Chřen* (Czech), *Chren dedinský* (Slovak), Common horseradish, *Cran* (French), *Cren* (Italian), *Fujl har* (Arabic), *Gherk-mustarda* (Maltese), Great raifort, *Khren* (Russian), King's desire, *Kren* (German), *Křen selský* (Czech), *Lagen* (Chinese), *Meerettich* (German), *Mierikwortel* (Dutch), *Mronge* (Persian), Mountain radish, *Pepparrot* (Swedish), Pepper root, *Pepperrot* (Hungarian), Pepper turnip, *Piparjuuri* (Finnish), *Rábano picante* (Portuguese, Spanish), *Radiche à j'vaux* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Raifort* (French), Redcol, Red cole, *Rhyddygl Poeth* (Welsh), *Torma* (Turkish), and *Wasabi* (Japanese).

Warning – the whole fresh plant is poisonous. It may cause blistering on some skins and large internal doses can produce gastro-intestinal inflammation. It must not be taken internally if suffering thyroid problems and large doses should be avoided during pregnancy.

Poisonous for animals (which normally avoid it because of the smell and taste) they could experience internal inflammation, excitement, collapse and death if they ingested it.

The non-poisonous roots of horseradish can be confused with those of the equally non-poisonous American sweet cicely (*Osmorhiza longistylis*), 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 fool's parsley (*Aethusa cynapium*), of hemlock water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*), of hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), of pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) and of white bryony (*Bryonia dioica*).

Rusticana means 'of or from the countryside or wild places'.

Some authorities think horseradish was familiar to the Greeks from about 1000 BC and others ponder on the likelihood that the ancient Egyptians must also have known the plant (probably as a tender young leaf-salad vegetable) from the time of the 18th or 19th Dynasties of the New Kingdom (1500-1300 BC) if its traditional Jewish inclusion as one of the bitter herbs is based on historical fact. Yet despite this for others it is a more recent plant which they believe originally came from eastern Europe, and that it began to be distributed in western Europe (particularly Germany and Denmark) from the 13th Century. In either case it is believed not to have reached England before the 16th Century – and from there it was transported to North America with some of the early settlers.

In about 1640 Britain first used horseradish in the kitchen, after Germany and Denmark had long been incorporating it in a fish sauce. In Britain it has been thought of primarily as an accompaniment for roast beef, while the French continue to eat the root sliced and salted.

Horseradish is said to be one of the five bitter herbs that the Jews were required to eat during the Feast of Passover (in memory of their Egyptian slavery).

Horseradish was used as a cosmetic ingredient in skin cleansers, and was also employed as a freckle remover.

This perennial came to be known on the other side of the Atlantic and the North American Cherokee Indians used the root (as the Europeans did) as a flavouring. For the Mohican tribe however horseradish was a remedy (used in the form of a leaf poultice) for toothache.

Several North American tribes absorbed horseradish into their medicine chests. The Iroquois prescribed a root infusion for treating blood and also included the plant in treatments for diabetes, while some of the Delaware Indians applied leaf poultices to the brow to ease headaches. From records however it would seem that the Cherokee tribe put the plant to the greatest medicinal use. Not only did they recognize it as an appetite enhancer and digestive aid but they also used it for treating a range of problems including sore throats and other oral problems, colds, asthma, fluid retention, some period problems and rheumatism.

Although today it is thought of as a culinary ingredient it was originally recognized as a medicinal herb. The old European herbalists used to recommend that horseradish be taken internally for fluid retention, poor digestion, scurvy, rheumatism, persistent coughs, whooping cough and worms. Externally poultices of crushed root were applied for treating sciatica, gout and facial neuralgia. The leaves can also be used as an alternative to dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*) as an antidote for nettle stings (*Urtica dioica*). Horseradish can be an ingredient in some proprietary medicines.