

*Chondrus crispus*

**IRISH MOSS** is a seaweed. Found (usually submerged) mainly on the coastline of the North Atlantic Ocean and the western Baltic, it has feathery-like, reddish-purple to reddish-brown fronds.

It is also known as Carrageen, Carrageen moss, Carrageenan, Carrageen, Carrahan, Chondrus, Iberian moss, *Karrageenilevä* (Finnish), *Karragentång* (Swedish), Pearl moss, Sea moss, and Seaweed.

In cold water the fronds will swell and partially dissolve giving a sticky solution. If, instead, they are boiled in water (a decoction) a gel is formed upon cooling that can be thickened with the addition of milk protein.

Warning – Irish moss can be poisonous for some animals (but not for humans).

*Crispus* means ‘closely curled, finely or irregularly wavy’ with reference to the fronds.

The common name Carrageen (in its different spellings) is said by some to be derived from a small Irish town named Carrageen (but authorities have pointed out that this place is non-existent today and may never have existed) and by others from a Gaelic word for ‘little rock’ *carrigin*.

Irish moss was used in the past for fining beer, feeding cattle, dressing cotton, stuffing mattresses and printing cloth (as a colour thickener).

Today Irish moss is primarily used commercially by the food industry as a substitute for gelatine in milk drinks, ices, syrups, fruit juices, dressings, cheese and confectionery. It can also be used in making jellies, soups and custards. It can be found in shoe polishes, and is used by the paint and printing industries. The textile industry employs it to give a soft finish to materials, and the leather industry uses it in the finishing processes after tanning. For the cosmetics industry this seaweed provides a thickener.

Medicinally, it was recommended by herbalists for the treatment of coughs and other chest ailments, and of kidney and bladder disorders. But it sees little use today in these capacities although it is occasionally contained in proprietary medicines and is used as an emulsifier for cod liver and other oils.