

*Cochlearia officinalis*

[Synonyms : *Cochlearia cyclocarpa*]

**COMMON SCURVYGRASS** is an annual, biennial or perennial. Native to north-western Europe it has small, occasionally lilac-tinged, white flowers.

It is also known as *Cochléaire* (French), *Coclearia* (Italian), *Cranson* (French), *Cranson officinal* (French), *Echtes Löffelkraut* (German), *Erbe a cucchiaino* (Italian), *Herbe aux cuillers* (French), *Kasik otu* (Turkish), *Kokleare* (Danish), *Læge-kokleare* (Danish), *Lepelkruid* (Dutch), *Llwylys Cyffredin* (Welsh), *Löffelkraut* (German), *Löffelkresse* (German), *Lžičník lékařský* (Czech), Scorbute grass, Scrooby grass, Scrubby grass, Scurvy grass, *Skeawurt* (Danish), *Skörbjuggsört* (Swedish), *Skorbutkokleario* (Esperanto), and Spoonwort.

*Officinalis* means ‘of the shop (usually the apothecary’s or herbalist’s)’. Certain plants used for medicinal purposes, whether of actual or legendary value, were kept readily available and acquired this name.

Common scurvygrass was as its name suggests once used in the treatment of scurvy.

In past centuries, particularly with gradually increasing urbanization, diet on dry land could sometimes be just as deficient as that experienced by many of the long distance sailors. Thus apart from an infusion which was often drunk regularly to combat the dreaded enemy on long sea voyages, there was quite a call for common scurvygrass among landlubbers as well. In fact in London in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century it was sold on the streets and formed one of the famous London Cries. Scurvy Grass Ale was as popular then as a regular morning tonic as some of the fruit juices are at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Even as recently as the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century common scurvygrass was also made into Scurvy Grass Sandwiches with bitter orange (*Citrus aurantium*) and watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*).

Records indicate that in Alaska the fresh leaves were added to salads or cooked as a vegetable. Medicinally, apart from being used as a scurvy preventative common scurvygrass was also recommended as a gargle or mouthwash to treat mouth ulcers and sores, and was applied to the skin on spots and blemishes.