

Crambe maritima

[Synonyms : *Cochlearia maritima*, *Crambe pontica*]

SEA-KALE is a perennial. Native from western Europe to south-western Asia, it has small white flowers.

It is also known as *Almindelig strandkål* (Danish), *Brassica marina* (Italian), *Bresych y Môr* (Welsh), *Cavolo marino* (Italian), *Cavolo selvatico* (Italian), *Chou marin* (French), *Chou-mathin* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Colewort, *Col marina* (Spanish), *Col maritima* (Spanish), *Couve-marinha* (Portuguese), *Crambe* (French, German), *Crambé* (French), *Crambé maritime* (French), *Echter Meerkohl* (German), *Kapusta morskoia* (Russian), *Katran morskoj* (Russian), *Katrán přímořský* (Czech), *Krambo mara* (Esperanto), *Küsten-Meerkohl* (German), *Marbrasiko* (Esperanto), *Meerkohl* (German), *Merikaali* (Finnish), *Modrak morski* (Polish), Scurvy grass, Sea cabbage, Sea colewort, Strand cabbage, *Strandkål* (Danish, Swedish), *Tengerparti tátorján* (Hungarian), Wild cabbage, and *Zeekool* (Dutch).

The seeds are dispersed by the sea.

Maritima is Latin (of the sea) meaning ‘coastal, or of the sea or seaside’.

Some botanists believe sea-kale could be an ancestor of the trusty cabbage (*Brassica oleracea* var. *capitata*), especially if it were proved one day that the cabbage was native to northern Europe instead of eastern Asia.

Both the ancient Greeks and the Romans were familiar with sea-kale. Apparently it came to be recognized in due time as a source of green vegetable for sailors and, pickled or salted, was stored on board ship in barrels on long voyages.

Sea-kale, as a food, was generally viewed as a British specialty – and still can be today if the young shoots are treated like garden asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*). For hundreds of years however it is believed to have been familiar only in coastal villages and towns in Britain – the local people used to bring bunches harvested from the shore to the town markets. It has been noted by some authorities that even in 1760 the plant was a rarity in England beyond these areas and seed is understood to have been imported to London from Italy as a novelty. But forty-odd years later a West Country botanist eulogised its qualities in a pamphlet to such a degree that the turn of the Century saw Covent Garden in London divesting every accessible seaside town of its crop (wild or cultivated). This ultimately resulted in over-harvesting and today it is no longer a familiar sight in many of the areas where it used to be found in quantity, including those sites on the English south coast.

Although it was introduced to the gardens at Versailles in 1820 it has never gained popularity across the Channel in France.