

*Daucus carota*

[Synonyms : *Carota sativa*, *Caucalis carota*, *Caucalis daucus*, *Daucus communis*, *Daucus gingidium*, *Daucus gingidium* subsp. *gingidium*]

**WILD CARROT** is an annual to perennial. Native to North Africa, western Asia (particularly Afghanistan) and to Europe, it has small, white or pinkish flowers generally with one blackish-purple or bright red flower in the middle.

It is also known as Bees' nest, Beesnest plant, Beggar's basket, Beggars-ticks, Bird's nest, Bird's-nest fern, Bird's-nest plant, Bird's-nest root, *Carota* (Italian), *Carotte* (French), *Carotte sauvage* (French-Canadian and Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Carrot, Cax, Crow's nest, Devil's plague, Eltrot, Fiddle, Fool's parsley, *Gajar* (Urdu), Hen's foot, *Karati* (Kikuyu), *Karotte* (German), Keggas, Kex, Lace flower, *Möhre* (German), *Mohrrübe* (German), *Moronon y Maes* (Welsh), *Moron y Meygydd* (Welsh), *Mrkev obecná* (Czech), *Mrkva obyčajná* (Slovak), Parsnip, Philtron, Pig's parsley, *Porkkana* (Finnish), Queen Anne's lace, Rantipole, Roadside, *Rüebli* (German), *Sfunnarija* (Maltese), *Stafilnos* (Greek), *Vildmorot* (Swedish), *Wilde Möhre* (German), and Woodland carrot.

Warning – the juice should not be drunk in excess. It can cause a jaundiced appearance. The seeds should not be taken internally during pregnancy. The leaves, particularly when wet, can cause dermatitis on sensitive skins.

Wild carrot's leaves have been confused with those of hemlock (*Conium maculatum*).

*Carota* for some authorities is derived from old Greek *karoton* (wild carrot) and for others it means 'red-rooted'.

The ripening seeds form hollow, cup-like shapes which are said to have led to the name Bird's-nest root.

Archaeologists found carrots when excavating the Swiss lake villages at Robenhausen that date back to about 8000 BC – and it is included in an 8<sup>th</sup> Century list of aromatic herbs grown in Babylon. Although authorities suspect that both the ancient Greeks (as early as 500 BC) and the Romans relied on wild carrot as an aromatic herb (as well as in the former's case an aphrodisiac), they recognized it primarily as cattle fodder.

Some authorities suggest that a red carrot with a root bearing some resemblance to that familiar today might have been spread westwards from the Afghanistan region into the eastern Mediterranean some time from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The earliest relevant known record was made by an Arab writing between 1100 and 1150 in south-western Spain and he describes the appearance and culinary use by that time there of both a red and a yellow carrot. It is suspected that the carrot (still pale yellow or purplish-red) proceeded from Spain to France, Germany and the Netherlands during the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and reached Britain in the Century after that. Although it was eaten in Britain before the 16<sup>th</sup> Century it is believed that the root began to attain a wider acceptance in the Islands only after promotion of varieties cultivated in the Netherlands by the Flemish refugees. (They fled to England during Elizabeth I's reign to escape religious persecution from their Spanish overlords that was initiated on behalf of Philip II (1527-1598).) However even with the enthusiasm for this new vegetable, whether as food or in due course decoration, it is believed still to have been relatively rare by the time James I (1566-1625) ascended the

British throne in 1603. Then at his court it became fashionable for ladies to wear the feathery leaves as decoration in place of the customary feathers.

Meanwhile during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century in Germany horticulturists were developing the root crop that contributed to the forerunners of today's species of cultivated carrot (*Daucus carota* var. *sativus*).

Possibly as Queen Anne's lace, European settlers are believed to have introduced the root to North America in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> Century and the plant came to be known to several North American Indian tribes. Records show that the Sanpoil, Haisla, Oweekeno, Kitasoo and Hanaksiala Indians all ate the root as a vegetable.

For quite a few North American tribes the plant was a source of medicine. Apparently both the Mohican and Delaware Indians prescribed a flower infusion for the treatment of diabetes, and the Iroquois tribe used the plant to treat some female problems and blood disorders. The leaves provided a strong laxative for the Micmac Indians, and the Cherokee tribe used the plant as a wash on swellings.

Today wild carrot can be used as colouring by the food and drinks industries, and the essence is used by the perfumery industry.

Medicinally, the wild carrot was believed to be able to aid contraception, and herbalists recommended it for healing open sores and ulcers, as well as in remedies for the treatment of wind, worms and period problems. The single central blackish-purple or bright red flower in the flower head was believed in the past to be of use in treating epilepsy. Both the wild and cultivated species of carrot are used medicinally today. The wild plant is employed in the treatment of kidney stones, gout and cystitis.