

*Lactuca sativa*

[Synonyms : *Lactuca integrata*, *Lactuca scariola* var. *integrata*, *Lactuca scariola* var. *integrifolia*, *Lactuca scariola* var. *sativa*]

**GARDEN LETTUCE** a cultivated biennial (grown as an annual). Found in cultivation only in Europe, North America and elsewhere, it has small, pale yellow flowers that are often violet streaked.

It is also known as Common lettuce, *Gwylaeth* (Welsh), *Hass* (Maltese), *Huvudsallat* (Swedish), *Khus* (Arabic), *Kopfsalat* (German), *Laitue* (French), *Laktuko kultiva* (Esperanto), *Lattich* (German), *Lattich Kopfsalat* (German), *Lattuca* (Italian), *Lechuga* (Spanish), Lettuce, *Locika setá* (Czech), *Marul* (Turkish), *Ruokasalaatti* (Finnish), *Salad* (Hindi), *Salada* (Singhalese), *Salat* (German), *Salát* (Czech), *Salattu* (Tamil), *Sallat* (Swedish), *Shang tsoi* (Chinese), Sleepwort, and *Trädgårdssallat* (Swedish); and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of cold-heartedness, and temperance.

The flowers open in the morning and close at noon.

*Sativa* means ‘cultivated’.

Garden lettuce was not without its share of associated superstition. Despite the belief amongst some that the plant had aphrodisiacal qualities others were convinced that if a single girl planted too many garden lettuces she would never marry, an excess of it in the garden would reduce a wife’s fertility, and that it was actually an anaphrodisiac. For this reason records suggest that 16<sup>th</sup> Century Elizabethan women appear to have eaten garden lettuce in vast quantities in order to try and avoid unwanted pregnancies.

This was one of the bitter herbs that was eaten by the Jews at the Feast of Passover referred to in the Book of Exodus in the Bible.

Authorities have noted that in North America some of the Keresan Indians ate the tender young plants as lettuce is most commonly served today (in other words as a salad vegetable), while others prepared them as a cooked green vegetable.

Records also show that garden lettuce has been used as a medicine by the Meskwaki Indians who gave a leaf infusion to a mother straight after her baby was born in order to encourage her milk. The Isleta tribe believed that eating fresh leaves would cure stomach-ache.

It is the birthday flower for 20<sup>th</sup> March.