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Lactuca serriola

[Synonyms : *Lactuca scariola*, *Lactuca virosa*]

PRICKLY LETTUCE is an annual or biennial. Native to Europe (from the Canary Islands to Siberia) it has tiny, mauve-tinged, pale yellow flowers with deep yellow centres.

It is also known as Compass plant, *Gwylaeth Bigog* (Welsh), Horse thistle, *Kahu* (Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi), *Kavu* (Telugu), *Kompass-Lattich* (German), *Laitue scarole* (French), *Lecheras* (Spanish), *Locika kompasová* (Czech), Milk grass, Milk thistle, *Piikkisalaatti* (Finnish), Prickly wild lettuce, *Šalát kompasový* (Slovak), *Salattu* (Tamil), *Stachel-Lattich* (German), *Taggsallat* (Swedish), *Wilder Lattich* (German), *Wilde Slaai* (Afrikaans), Wild lettuce, and Wild opium.

Prickly lettuce is the source of the Egyptian lettuce-seed oil that is used in food.

Warning – the latex can irritate the eyes and excessive intake can be poisonous. The plant should not be used medicinally unless under the supervision of a qualified practitioner. It can be poisonous for some animals.

Serriola is Latin (little saw) with reference to the prickly-edged leaves.

The common name Compass plant reflects the growth of some of the leaves. In the open they can grow twisted vertically at their base so that their edges point north and south.

Records indicate that the plant came to be known in North America and that some of the Navajo Indians included it as an ingredient in a ceremonial potion taken to cause vomiting.

Medicinally, the plant has been used in India to treat bronchitis, asthma and coughs.