

Levisticum officinale

[Synonyms : *Angelica levisticum*, *Hipposelinum levisticum*, *Levisticum paludapifolium*, *Ligusticum levisticum*]

LOVAGE is a perennial. Native to the eastern Mediterranean (particularly Iran) it has tiny, greenish-yellow flowers.

It is also known as Bladderseed, Cornish lovage, Court lovage, *Echte Liebstöckel* (German), English lovage, European lovage, Garden lovage, Italian lovage, *L'angélique à feuilles d'ache* (French), Lavose, *Levistico* (Italian), *Libbsticka* (Swedish), *Libeček lékařský* (Czech), *Libsticka* (Swedish), *Liebstöck* (German), *Liebstöckel* (German), *Ligustico* (Italian, Spanish), *Liperi* (Finnish), *Livèche* (French), Lovage angelica, Love parsley, *Maggi* (Italian), *Maggikraut* (German), Mountain hemlock, Old Scotch lovage, Sea parsley, *Séséli* (French and Italian), and Smallage.

Warning – lovage should not be taken internally either during pregnancy or if suffering from kidney problems. It can cause an allergic reaction on some sensitive skins ie. photosensitivity.

Officinale 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.

Lovage was familiar to the ancient Greeks who chewed the seeds as a digestive aid. It was mentioned by Pliny (23-79), the Roman natural history historian, and some authorities believe it was first introduced to northern Europe from Italy in the 8th Century.

In lore and legend lovage was portrayed as being able to solve problems of the heart, which suggests that it may well have been an ingredient in love potions. For the traveller the leaves, when placed inside his shoes, were supposed to alleviate any tiredness.

Lovage also played its part in some regions of Europe in superstition. It was one of the plants that if formed into the shape of a cross could be relied upon to identify witches.

In Europe during the Middle Ages lovage was a common sight in kitchen, public house and monastery garden. In the kitchen the powdered root was used as pepper (*Piper nigrum*) is today, and in British public houses it used to be possible to purchase a cordial called Lovage which was said to have gained a reputation for being ‘good for you’. However its ingredients, although they may have included lovage, were primarily yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*). Young lovage stems can be treated in the kitchen like garden angelica (*Angelica archangelica*). The seeds were once used for flavouring bread. Occasionally today they can still be found used as a vegetable or as a flavouring (removed before serving) in soups, stews and fish sauces.

15th Century veterinary medicine relied upon lovage in the treatment of sick cattle.

Today lovage as an essence is a commercial ingredient for drinks industry, particularly in fortified wines. It is also used by the perfumery industry, and the food industry employs it for seasoning products.

Medicinally, the plant was once used to treat bronchial catarrh, migraine, stomach disorders, fevers and rheumatism. It was also recommended for tonsillitis and other throat infections, as well as attracting a reputation for being able to improve the digestive system. The

ground seed can provide a flavouring for medicines and today the plant can still be used to treat indigestion, and cystitis, and offer a gargle or mouthwash for oral infections.