

Portulaca oleracea

[Synonyms : *Portulaca consanguinea*, *Portulaca intermedia*, *Portulaca marginata*, *Portulaca neglecta*, *Portulaca oleracea* subsp. *granulatostellulata*, *Portulaca oleracea* subsp. *impolita*, *Portulaca oleracea* subsp. *nicaraguensis*, *Portulaca oleracea* subsp. *nitida*, *Portulaca oleracea* var. *opposita*, *Portulaca oleracea* subsp. *papillatostellulata*, *Portulaca oleracea* subsp. *stellata*, *Portulaca oleracea* subsp. *sylvestris*, *Portulaca pusilla*, *Portulaca retusa*]

COMMON PURSLANE (English, French) is an invasive annual or biennial. Native from Greece to China it has small yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Baraloniya* (Bengali), *Barbîn* (Arabic), *Burdlieqa* (Maltese), *Coupie pourpier* (French), Duckweed, ast Indian cress, Fat weed, Garden purslane, *Gatumia* (Kikuyu), *Gelang* (Sundanese), *Gelang pasir* (Malay), *Genda-kola* (Singhalese), *Gewone Porslein* (Afrikaans), *Golasíman* (Filipino/Tagalog), Green purslane, Indian cress, *Khurfa* (Urdu), Kitchen-garden purslane, *Koricchira* (Malayalam), *Krokot* (Javanese), *Launinonia* (Hindi), Little hogweed, *Lonika* (Sanskrit), Low pigweed, *Pak bia yai* (Thai), *Pappukura* (Telugu), Pigweed, *Porcellana* (Italian), *Portlak* (Swedish), *Portulak* (German, Swedish), *Portulakka* (Finnish), *Portulako legoma* (Esperanto), Pot purslane, *Pourpier* (French), *Pourpyi* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Pressley, *Pulik-kirai* (Tamil), Purslane, Purslane (English, French), Pursley, Pursly, Pusley, *Pussley* (West Indian), *Rikkaportulakka* (Finnish), *Šruča zelná* (Czech), *Trädgårdsportlak* (Swedish), *Verdolaga* (Spanish), *Vihannesportulakka* (Finnish), *Vildportlak* (Swedish), Wild purslane, and Yellow portulaca.

The flowers open for a short time around noon and are short-lived. Many cultivated varieties have been developed and their taste is often less sharp.

Oleracea means ‘vegetable- or cooking herb-like or of the herb-, vegetable or kitchen garden’. Common purslane has been a foodstuff for thousands of years and although authorities state it is native from Greece to China this plant seems to have been in existence in/spread to places far flung from that range long before the Christian era. It is said to be mentioned as a vegetable in some of the ancient Egyptian texts and it has long provided food in the Middle East and Asia (not least India). But records also indicate that some of the Aborigine tribes in Australia were eating the seeds, roots and leaves too before the relatively recent Australian settlers arrived there.

It was only introduced to England in 1582 although it had been familiar on the western European mainland for centuries. There seems to be a debate with regard to the Americas. According to some authorities it was introduced to North America by early European settlers and that by the 1700s it had become so well established that it was sometimes viewed as a native. On the other hand in the mid-1970s records show that archaeologists in Kentucky in the eastern-central United States claimed to have found the plant’s seeds in digs there. Results from carbon dating them indicated that they were harvested during the first millenium BC. Thus for some authorities this has pointed to the possibility that the plant may have been introduced far far earlier to the New World (ultimately from Asia) as the Indian tribes flowed down southwards from Alaska through the American Continents.

For West Africans the leaves not only provided a cooked vegetable (like spinach, *Spinacia oleracea*) but also when mixed with oil an offering to placate evil spirits. In this latter form they were proffered in other rituals too.

Many communities besides those in Africa believed that one of common purslane's advantages was that the plant promised protection from various forces, particularly if it was scattered over the bed. These ranged through evil spirits, lightning, planets and even death by gunpowder, the latter obviously of more recent origin.

Known to the Romans it became popular in Europe (particularly in France and Italy) in the 16th Century when one of its main culinary uses was as a flavouring in pickles. In France it was eventually combined with French sorrel (*Rumex scutatus*) for the traditional soup *bonne femme*. Today in the West common purslane is sometimes added to soups, sauces and salads. It can be a familiar sight in Mexican, Chinese and Indian markets too.

Some North American Indian tribes assimilated common purslane into their diet. Although records show that some of the Apache ate the plant raw, it appears that most tribes (including the Hopi, others of the Apache, the Keresan, Tewa, Iroquois, some of the Tohono O'odham, some of the Navajo, the Acoma and the Luiseño) cooked it. The Isleta Indians dried and stored the plant for a Winter vegetable – and the Navajo tribe ate the seeds.

Its leaves are enjoyed by animals.

In Hawaii this plant was taken as a tonic while on the North American Continent Indian tribes turned to it for a variety of medical reasons. It was applied to burns and bruises by the Iroquois and to the feet by the Rappahannock. The Navajo tribe took it for treating stomach upsets and pain, while the Cherokee used it for ear problems and worms. It offered a treatment for both diarrhoea and lock-jaw among the Keresan

Medicinally, it was once a remedy for scurvy because of its high Vitamin C content. It has also been used by herbalists in the treatment of various lung and skin diseases and venereal disease, and was also recommended for easing vomiting, restlessness and eye inflammation, as well as providing an adhesive for loose teeth and a remedy for expelling worms from children. On the Indonesian island of Sumatra it has been used to treat chest disorders. In Africa boils were healed with a poultice of leaves and oil. In 1986 in the United States Greek-born Dr. Artemis P. Simopoulos discovered that common purslane is a rich plant source for acids most commonly found in fish oils – acids that are associated with the treatment of blood disorders, inflammation and the immune system.