

Rumex acetosa

[Synonyms : *Acetosa fontano-paludosa*, *Acetosa pratensis*, *Rumex acetosa* subsp. *fontano-paludosus*, *Rumex acetosa* subsp. *pratensis*, *Rumex acetosa* var. *vulgaris*, *Rumex fontano-paludosus*, *Rumex rugosus*]

COMMON SORREL is a perennial. Native to Europe (including Britain) and to northern Asia, it has tiny greenish or reddish-brown flowers.

It is also known as *Acedera* (Spanish), *Acetosa* (Italian), *Ampfer* (German), *Ängssyra* (Swedish), *Azedas* (Portuguese), Bread-and-cheese, Bread-and-sauce, Brown sugar, *Chuka* (Hindi), Cock sorrel, Cuckoo's meate, Cuckoo sorrow, Cuckoo's sorrel, Dock seed, Donkey's oats, *Doque* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), English sorrel, Garden sorrel, Gipsy's baccy, *Grand' suthelle* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Green sauce, Green snob, Green sorrel, *Grosse Sauerampfer* (German), *Kyseláč luční* (Czech), Lammie sourocks, *Lapatah* (Greek), London green sauce, Meadow sorrel, *Niittysuolaheinä* (Finnish), *Oseille* (French), *Oseille des prés* (French), Patriot's blood, Rain, Redshank, Red sour leek, Sallet, *Sauerampfer* (German), Sharp dock, Sheep sorrel, Soldiers, Soorocks, Sorrel, Sorrow, Sour dock, Sour docken, Sour dogs, Sour dots, Sour ducks, Sour grabs, Sourgrass, Sour leaves, Sour leek, Sourlick, Sourock, Sour sabs, Sour salves, Sour saps, Sour sauce, Sour sodge, Sour sog, Sour sops, Sour suds, Sour weed, Sow-sorrel, *Šťovík kyselý* (Czech), *Suran y Cwn* (Welsh), Tall sorrel, Tom thumb's thousand fingers, *Verldzuring* (Dutch), Vinegar leaves, Vinegar plant, and *Wiesen-Sauerampfer* (German); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of affection, paternal affection, and 'resignation in sorrow'.

Warning – common sorrel leaves can cause kidney damage if taken internally in very large doses. It should not be taken internally if suffering from arthritis, some gastric disorders, gout, kidney stones or rheumatism. Handling the leaf can cause dermatitis. Common sorrel can be poisonous to varying degrees for some animals.

Acetosa is derived from Latin *acetum* (vinegar) and is a Latin name for plants with acidic leaves.

The leaves were used to flavour sauces and cooked as a vegetable. During food shortages it was added to bread in Scandinavian countries, and in Lapland it provided an alternative to rennet. Records suggest that in 16th Century England it was not only eaten in cold in salads but also cooked – but enthusiasm for it seems to have dropped away there in subsequent centuries. In France barley water was coloured red with the root to give to patients who would be better not drinking wine.

The plant was used for bleaching straw and for removing rust marks or ink stains from linen. At some point it reached North America where the North American Cherokee Indians absorbed the plant into their diet and ate the leaves as a vegetable. It was also a source of medicine for one or two tribes including the Apalachee Indians – and some of the Alaskan Inuits took a stem and leaf decoction to counter diarrhoea.

Medicinally, in the past European herbalists recommended common sorrel for the treatment of fever, quenching thirst, ringworm, skin diseases, jaundice, kidney stones, scorpion stings and fever, as well as proposing it as a preventative for scurvy. Today it is used in homoeopathic treatments.

It is the birthday flower for 17th March.