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*Sium sisarum*

**SKIRRET** is a perennial. Native to eastern Asia it has tiny fragrant, white flowers.

It is also known as Chervin, Crummock, Jellico, *Sevlák zeleninový* (Czech), *Sizaro* (Esperanto), Skirwort, *Sockerrot* (Swedish), *Süsswurz* (German), Water parsnip, and *Zuckerwurz* (German).

*Sisarum* is a corruption of Arabic *dgizer* (carrot).

Native to the Far East skirret was brought to Rome overland from China by early traders and so welcomed by the Emperor Tiberius (42 BC-37 AD) that he was even prepared to accept it as tribute.

There seems to be some discrepancy between authorities on skirret's progression into Europe.

While some believe it had reached Britain by at least Anglo-Saxon times and may well have been introduced there by the Romans, others contend that the delights of the edible aromatic root (which became an invaluable crop among the peasantry until it was superseded by the potato (*Solanum tuberosum*)) were only introduced to northern Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century via Siberia and Russia. Although some authorities claim that it has been cultivated in England since 1548 others say that it was one of Henry VIII's (1491-1547) favourites – and he died in 1547. (If his enthusiasm for it is correct, while he could have had it imported from the Continent it would seem surprising that no attempt was made to grow it for him in England.) In Europe it was not only cooked as a vegetable and eaten as a salad plant but also its roots were sometimes roasted and prepared as a substitute for coffee. Today the French appear to be spear-heading a slight revival of interest in skirret as a vegetable.