



## LOVAGE

*Levisticum officinale*



### Family

Apiaceae (Hardy perennial)

### Description

In appearance and growth habit, lovage bears a resemblance to angelica. The flowers are small and sulphur-yellow. Lovage's slim, hollow stems, bear flat, serrated, dark green trifoliate leaves which branch out from thicker, channeled stalks. The yellow flowers are followed by oblong, ribbed brown seeds.

### Cultivation

Lovage likes rich moist soil, and grows well in either a sunny or shady position. Seed can be sown in prepared boxes or in the open ground in spring. When seedlings are about 8cm high, plant them out to 45cm apart. Keep watered in dry weather. Plants die down each winter, re-emerging each spring. They reach maturity in 4yrs and grow to a height of 1.5m. Most people find that one plant is sufficient in the garden, although as an aromatic herb it has a particularly enlivening effect on root vegetables such as potatoes, and swedes.

### Harvesting

Harvest the seed just before it starts to fall by snipping off and drying whole flower heads. Store seed in airtight containers.

The stems can be cut and used anytime. If candying them like angelica stems, the flavour is best just after flowering,

The root is stored, after digging and washing, in an airy, dry place until needed.

The leaves, for making into a tea, or for culinary use may be cut from stems, and laid on sheets of clean paper or racks, in a shady warm place until dry. When they are brittle, crumble and place into airtight containers, or freeze with water in ice cube trays. Whole leaf sprays may be sealed in foil and frozen for a few weeks.

### Culinary use

The whole plant except the root tastes strongly of celery, with a little parsley flavour and an extra peppery bite.

The Dutch call this herb the 'maggi plant'. As the flavor is dominating leaves may be used fresh and sparingly in salads, in soups, red meat stews, and some sauces. Seeds can be added to bread and scones.

Stalks and stems are often preserved as a confection, in the same way as angelica.

For those on a condiment free diet, use lovage for its spicy peppery taste.

## **Medicinal use**

The leaves eaten raw in a salad, or infused dry as a tea, are recognized as being stimulating for the digestive organs. In special diets the chopped leaves are an excellent substitute for pepper and other hot spices. It is believed that chewing the stems will help prevent infection.

## **Cosmetic uses**

Lovage is considered to be a deodorizing herb both in solutions for the outside of the body, and as an inner cleanser for the system so as to acquire a clear skin outwardly. After a strenuous day, lovage is delightfully refreshing in a bath. Pick fresh leaves, bruising them and put them straight into the bath water.

Lovage originated from the Mediterranean, growing wild in the mountainous regions of northern Greece and the south of France. It found its way to Britain many centuries ago and became one of the most cultivated of English herbs for use in herbal medicine.

## **Recipes:**

### ***Onion Soup***

(Serves 6-8)

250gms onion

45gms butter

4-5 cups beef stock

2 bay leaves

1/2t tarragon, chopped

2t lovage, chopped

2t chives, chopped

2T flour

½ cup dry white wine (optional)

Grated cheddar cheese

1 slice bread per person

Salt and pepper

Chop onions finely, heat butter till foaming and add onions. Cook on low heat till golden (15-20 mins).

Stir in the flour to thicken the mixture and continue cooking for 2 mins. Add stock to the onion mixture and stir; add bay leaves, tarragon, lovage, and wine; simmer for 30 mins.

Grate the cheese, mix with chives and spread on slices of bread. Grill until the cheese bubbles. Place a slice in each bowl and pour in soup.

### ***Soup with Herbs***

(Serves 4)

3 cups chicken stock

2 potatoes, sliced

4 leeks, sliced

2 carrots, sliced

Small bunch – marjoram  
and lemon balm

OR sorrel and lovage.

Parsley, to garnish

Simmer vegetables in stock till tender.

Add the herbs, finely chopped. Mash the vegetables and herbs together.

Serve garnished with parsley.

This is a simple soup with a fragrant bouquet.

## **References –**

Herbs Their Cultivation and Usage – John and Rosemary Hemphill

The herb Growers Handbook for New Zealanders – Gillian Painter

The Twenty Five Herb Book – Beatrice Hale, Elizabeth Hinds