

Lovage — *Levisticum officinale* Koch.¹

James M. Stephens²

Lovage is a perennial plant of the carrot family grown more for confectionary purposes than as a vegetable. Like angelica (*A. archangelica*), lovage seeds and stems are used in candy-making. Also, the leafstalk and blanched lower portion of the stem are eaten like celery. Lovage imparts a celery-like flavor to soups and stews.

This umbelliferous plant is of Mediterranean origin. Its name derives from the Latin “ligusticus,” the name of the Italian shore opposite Genoa where it grew wild. The old French name was “levesche” or “luvesche,” which accounts for the English name love-ache, meaning love-parsley, now called lovage.

DESCRIPTION

The lovage plant is tall with yellow flowers. Its leaves are dark green, shiny, and much like carrot, but wider like celery. Stems are thick and hollow.

CULTURE

Lovage has been grown occasionally as a garden plant in Florida. The best soils are well drained and of the same fertility required for most garden vegetables. Lovage is propagated from seed or by root divisions. Seeds that retain viability for 2 to 3 years may be planted in the garden in the fall through spring. Lightly cover seeds with a sprinkling of sand. An old burlap bag placed over the seedbed and kept watered aids in getting the lovage seeds to germinate. Remove the cover at the emergence of the first seedlings.

Seedlings may be transplanted. Row spacing should be 18 inches, with plants spaced 8 inches apart.

Since lovage is a perennial plant, the roots may be dug at the end of the second or third year. Numerous off-sets from these roots may be found which may be reset to renew the planting.

USE

The freshly dug, thick roots are washed, cut into slices about ½ inch thick, and carefully dried. Sometimes artificial heat up to 125°F is used to hasten drying.

Roots have long been thought to have medicinal properties so are in some demand by drug manufacturers. The flowering top yields a volatile oil, but there seems to be limited interest in it. All three parts (seeds, leaves, and roots) are used for flavoring foods.

A close relative of lovage, Scottish lovage (*L. scoticum*), is eaten both raw and boiled as a vegetable. This plant is also known as sea-parsley. Another related lovage is Canadian lovage (*L. canadense*), which is eaten by Alaskan Eskimos.

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