

# Lovage Root and Leaf Profile

## Also known as

Levisticum officinale, Garden Lovage, Sea Parsley and Love root.

## Introduction

Lovage is a flowering plant in the same family as carrots, parsley, and dill. Its dark green leaves resemble cilantro, while the stalks resemble celery. The herb is sweeter but stronger than celery. Brought from Europe as both a food and as a medicinal, it now grows wild in the United States in New England, the Great Lakes states, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. For centuries, it has been thought of as a good ingredient to add to love potions. During the 1800's a cordial made from lovage, tansy, and yarrow was widely available as a folk remedy for an upset stomach. Charlemagne was said to have liked the sight of lovage so much so that he had the grounds of his estate populated with it.

## Constituents

Quercetin. The root also contains 1,8-cineole, camphor, coumarins, eugenol, limonene, and methol.

## Parts Used

The entire plant is medicinal, but typically the roots and the leaves are used in herbal medicine.

## Typical Preparations

Teas, tinctures, encapsulations. Also eaten fresh as a vegetable. Sometimes combined with ligusticum (Chinese lovage root) or osha in cough remedies. The dried leaf may be sprinkled on food or added to soup stock.

## Summary

Quercetin is what makes lovage an excellent allergy cure, and also an excellent treatment for bronchitis, indigestion, and colic. Grieve's Herbal notes that the roots, leaves and fruits are antispasmodic, aromatic, carminative, diaphoretic, digestive, diuretic, mildly expectorant and stimulant. The leaves eaten as a vegetable or used several times a day as an herb may stimulate menstruation. Modern herbalists also use lovage to treat kidney stones, urinary tract infections, and to relieve flatulence and gas pains.

## Precautions

May intensify sunburn. Not recommended while pregnant.

**Botanical: *Levisticum officinale* (KOCH.)**

**Family: N.O. Umbelliferae**

- [Description](#)
- [Cultivation](#)
- [Parts Used](#)
- [Constituents](#)
- [Medicinal Action and Uses](#)

---**Synonyms**---Ligusticum Levisticum (Linn.). Old English Lovage. Italian Lovage. Cornish Lovage.

---**Parts Used**---Root, leaves, seeds, young stems.

---**Habitat**---It is not considered to be indigenous to Great Britain, and when occasionally found growing apparently wild, it is probably a garden escape. It is a native of the Mediterranean region, growing wild in the mountainous districts of the south of France, in northern Greece and in the Balkans.

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The Garden Lovage is one of the old English herbs that was formerly very generally cultivated, and is still occasionally cultivated as a sweet herb, and for the use in herbal medicine of its root, and to a less degree, the leaves and seeds.

It is a true perennial and hence is very easy to keep in garden cultivation; it can be propagated by offsets like Rhubarb, and it is very hardy. Its old-time repute has suffered by the substitution of the medicinally more powerful Milfoil and Tansy, just as was the case when 'Elecampane' superseded Angelica in medical use. The public-house cordial named 'Lovage,' formerly much in vogue, however, owed such virtue as it may have possessed to Tansy. Freshly-gathered leafstalks of Lovage (for flavouring purposes) should be employed in long split lengths.

---**Description**---This stout, umbelliferous plant has been thought to resemble to some degree our Garden Angelica, and it does very closely resemble the Spanish *Angelica heterocarpa* in foliage and perennial habit of growth. It has a thick and fleshy root, 5 or 6 inches long, shaped like a carrot, of a greyish-brown colour on the outside and whitish within. It has a strong aromatic smell and taste. The thick, erect hollow and channelled stems grow 3 or 4 feet or even more in height. The large, dark green radical leaves, on erect stalks, are divided into narrow wedge-like segments, and are not unlike those of a coarse-growing celery; their surface is shining, and when bruised they give out an aromatic odour, somewhat reminiscent both of Angelica and Celery. The stems divide towards the top to form opposite whorled branches, which in June and July bear umbels of yellow flowers, similar to those of Fennel or Parsnip, followed by small, extremely aromatic fruits, yellowish-brown in colour, elliptical in shape and curved, with three prominent winged ribs. The odour of the whole plant is very strong. Its taste is warm and aromatic, and it abounds with a yellowish, gummy, resinous juice.

It is sometimes grown in gardens for its ornamental foliage, as well as for its pleasant odour, but it is not a striking enough plant to have claimed the attention of poets and painters, and no myths or legends are connected with it. The name of the genus, *Ligusticum*, is said to be derived from Liguria, where this species abounds.

[\[Top\]](#)

---**Cultivation**---Lovage is of easy culture. Propagation is by division of roots or by seeds. Rich moist,

but well-drained soil is required and a sunny situation. In late summer, when the seed ripens, it should be sown and the seedlings transplanted, either in the autumn or as early in spring as possible, to their permanent quarters, setting 12 inches apart each way. The seeds may also be sown in spring, but it is preferable to sow when just ripe. Root division is performed in early spring.

The plants should last for several years, if the ground be kept well cultivated, and where the seeds are permitted to scatter the plants will come up without care.

**---Parts Used---**The *root, leaves* and *seeds* for medicinal purposes.

The *young stems*, treated like Angelica, for flavouring and confectionery.

**---Constituents---**Lovage contains a volatile oil, angelic acid, a bitter extractive, resins, etc. The colouring principle has been isolated by M. Niklis, who gives it the name of Ligulin, and suggests an important application of it that may be made in testing drinking water. If a drop of its alcoholic or aqueous solution is allowed to fall into distilled water, it imparts to the liquid its own fine crimson-red colour, which undergoes no change; but if limestone water be substituted, the red colour disappears in a few seconds and is followed by a beautiful blue, due to the alkalinity of the latter.

[\[Top\]](#)

**---Medicinal Action and Uses---**Formerly Lovage was used for a variety of culinary purposes, but now its use is restricted almost wholly to confectionery, the young stems being treated like those of Angelica, to which, however, it is inferior, as its stems are not so stout nor so succulent.

The leafstalks and stem bases were formerly blanched like celery, but as a vegetable it has fallen into disuse.

A herbal tea is made of the leaves, when previously dried, the decoction having a very agreeable odour.

Lovage was much used as a drug plant in the fourteenth century, its medicinal reputation probably being greatly founded on its pleasing aromatic odour. It was never an official remedy, nor were any extravagant claims made, as with Angelica, for its efficacy in numberless complaints.

The roots and fruit are aromatic and stimulant, and have diuretic and carminative action. In herbal medicine they are used in disorders of the stomach and feverish attacks, especially for cases of colic and flatulence in children, its qualities being similar to those of Angelica in expelling flatulence, exciting perspiration and opening obstructions. The leaves eaten as salad, or infused dry as a tea, used to be accounted a good emmenagogue.

An infusion of the root was recommended by old writers for gravel, jaundice and urinary troubles, and the cordial, sudorific nature of the roots and seeds caused their use to be extolled in 'pestilential disorders.' In the opinion of Culpepper, the working of the seeds was more powerful than that of the root; he tells us that an infusion 'being dropped into the eyes taketh away their redness or dimness.... It is highly recommended to drink the decoction of the herb for agues.... The distilled water is good for quinsy if the mouth and throat be gargled and washed therewith.... The decoction drunk three or four times a day is effectual in pleurisy.... The leaves bruised and fried with a little hog's lard and laid hot to any blotch or boil will quickly break it.'

Several species of this umbelliferous genus are employed as domestic medicines. The root of *LIGUSTICUM SINENSE*, under the name of KAO-PÂU, is largely used by the Chinese, and in the north-western United States the large, aromatic roots of *LIGUSTICUM FILICINUM* (OSHA COLORADO COUGH-ROOT) are used to a considerable extent as stimulating expectorants.

The old-fashioned cordial, 'Lovage,' now not much in vogue, though still occasionally to be found in public-houses, is brewed not only from the Garden Lovage, *Ligusticum levisticum*, but mainly from a species of Milfoil or Yarrow, *Achillea ligustica*, and from Tansy, *Tanacetum vulgare*, and probably owes its merit more to these herbs than to Lovage itself. From its use in this cordial, Milfoil has often been mistakenly called Lovage, though it is in no way related to the Umbellifer family.

Several other plants have been termed Lovage besides the true Lovage, and this has frequently caused confusion. Thus we have the SCOTCH LOVAGE, known also as Sea Lovage, or Scotch Parsley, and botanically as *Ligusticum scoticum*; the BLACK LOVAGE, or Alexanders, *Smyrniolum Olusatrum*; BASTARD LOVAGE, a species of the allied genus, *Laserpitium*, and WATER LOVAGE, a species of the genus *Cenanthe*.

*Laserpitium* may be distinguished from its allies by the fruit having eight prominent, wing-like appendages. The species are perennial herbs, chiefly found in south-eastern Europe. Some of them are employed as domestic remedies, on account of their aroma.

The scent of the root of MEUM ATHAMANTICUM (Jacq.), SPIGNEL (also called *Spikenel* or *Spiknel*), MEU or BALD-MONEY, has much in common with that of both Lovage and Angelica, and the root has been eaten by the Scotch Highlanders as a vegetable. It is a perennial, smooth and very aromatic herb. The elongated root is crowned with fibres, the leaves, mostly springing from the root, are divided into leaflets which are further cut into numerous thread-like segments, which gives them a feathery appearance. The stem is about 6 or 8 inches high, and bears umbels of white or purplish flowers. The aromatic flavour of the leaves is somewhat like Melilot, and is communicated to milk and butter when cows feed on the herbage in the spring. The peculiar name of this plant, 'Baldmoney,' is said to be a corruption of *Balder*, the *Apollo* of the northern nations, to whom the plant was dedicated.