



PLANT OF THE WEEK: LOVAGE

Posted on April 29, 2022 by The Lost Herbs

Lovage (*Levisticum officinale*) is an aromatic herbaceous perennial also known as Smellage or Maggi plant. Large in size and usefulness, lovage has edible leaves, stalks, seeds, and roots. Easy to cultivate, lovage towers over the herb or vegetable garden reaching 6 to 8 feet tall.

Related to other fragrant herbs including dill, carrots, and parsley, lovage leaves are appreciated in both soups and salads for their celery- and parsley-like flavor. The root of lovage is edible. Use fresh raw root grated in salads or sandwiches to show off its interesting taste. The stalks of the plant were traditionally candied or used to flavor beverages and the seeds make an agreeable spice.

The delightful fragrance of lovage is used to scent cosmetics and soaps. Medicinally, lovage works as a diuretic, meaning it helps increase the excretion of water from the body. Lovage [aids pain and swelling](#) of the lower urinary tract and helps to prevent kidney stones. It has also been used for heartburn, bloating, gas, indigestion, as well as joint pain, and headaches.

Where Lovage is Found

Lovage makes a robust specimen in the garden and grows over 6 feet tall in hardiness zones 3 to 9. Lovage prefers cool climates. Widely distributed and naturalized, it is hard to determine the origin of lovage. It has been used extensively for centuries throughout Europe and Asia.

Related: [The Complete Map of Edible Plants: Find Out What You Have in Your Area!](#) (Video)

How to Identify Lovage

- **Shape:** Tall, upright, herbaceous perennial 6 to 8 feet tall.
- **Leaves:** Shiny, hairless, greenish-yellow leaves formed from pointed leaflets, similar to celery or flat-leaf parsley.
- **Flower:** Abundant, small yellow flowers bloom in spring in large 4-to-6-inch terminal umbels.
- **Stem:** Smooth, hollow stems are tall and greenish-yellow.
- **Fruit & Seeds:** Two-parted dry seeds are ¼ inch long and mature in autumn.

Related: [Plant Identification Guide - 400 Wild Plants That You Can Forage For](#) (Video)

How to Grow Lovage

Because lovage is a long-lived perennial herb, choose a location for lovage that you will love for a long time. Lovage grows up to 8 feet tall with a spread of 2 to 3 feet. Ensure enough room for the massive herb plants at maturity. An area that is in full sun to part shade is perfect. Deep rich soil is best to support the long taproot that mature lovage plants will develop.

Lovage seed germinates in 10 to 14 days at 60° F. I have lost young lovage seedlings outdoors due

to snails and slugs. For this reason, I start seeds indoors 5 to 6 weeks before the last frost date. Once plants are robust with more than 2 sets of true leaves, they can be planted outdoors. This way, the plants are substantial enough to withstand annoying predators in the garden.

Related: [10 Plants That You Should Never Plant Together](#) (Video)

How to Harvest Lovage

As with many herbs, lovage leaves are at their best quality and flavor before the plant begins to flower. Spring is the perfect time to harvest lovage leaves, although, they can be harvested at any time. In the plants' first season, it is best to harvest just some of the leaves.

This is because the leaves help to feed the roots while the perennial plant is getting established.

The abundant seeds can be harvested easily as they will begin to fall off their umbels once they are dry. Trim a few umbels and place them in paper bags or on sheet trays to collect lovage seeds.

Mature plants benefit from division. Springtime, before the leaves and stalks emerge in earnest, is a great time to divide large lovage plants. This is also the time when lovage roots are at their sweetest, as they arise from their winter slumber. Harvest roots in early spring to use as a vegetable or for medicinal purposes.

What Lovage Is Good For & The Natural Remedies Made From It

Lovage is incredibly nutritious and boasts high levels of vitamin C and B vitamins. Added to the diet, lovage is a health-promoting ingredient. Leaves are used in salads, or as a seasoning for broths or soup. The root can be eaten like a vegetable or grated in salads. Seeds can be used as a spice.

Lovage is known to have several [health benefits](#) including a diuretic and carminative effect to aid bladder and digestive issues. It has shown anti-inflammatory and antibacterial activity and can also have an appetite-stimulating effect.

Lovage makes a wonderful essential oil. It can also be made into tinctures, decoctions, infusions as well as emersions in vinegar and elixirs.

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What Parts of Lovage Are Used in Remedies?

For medicinal purposes, the leaves, roots, and stems of lovage are commonly used. The essential oil of lovage has [compounds high in polyphenols](#). These polyphenols show protection against oxidative stress and inflammatory processes in humans. Excitingly, there is a growing interest in the

high dietary content of phenolic compounds due to their multiple biological activities. These activities relate to disease prevention including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and Alzheimer's.

A DIY Recipe for Starting Lovage Plants from Seed

I often lose young lovage seedlings to snails and slugs in the garden. This year, I am starting lovage plants indoors, in a simple windowsill greenhouse. In this way, I hope to plant out large, substantial plants this spring that will survive any munching mouths.

Method

Step 1: Once you have obtained lovage seeds, prepare a planting area. Use a loose, moist, rich planting medium such as a seed starting mix. Ensure there is adequate drainage.**Step 2:** Place an abundant layer of lovage seeds in the soil medium. Lovage has a low germination rate. For this reason, use more seeds than you might normally.**Step 3:** Scatter a small layer of soil or sand over seeds, just to barely cover them.**Step 4:** Place a greenhouse cover over the seeds. This will retain moisture and keep a consistent temperature.**Step 5:** Sit back and wait. Here we have the first signs of germination on day 10.**Step 6:** By day 15 we have fully emerged lovage seedlings!**Step 7:** Here are enough lovage plants for the whole neighborhood! I will plant them out once they are big and strong. And, when the weather is a lot more pleasant!

Potential Uses

Growing lovage in the garden is a helpful companion plant because the flowering plants attract many beneficial insects to the garden.

You can harvest young and mature plant parts to include in the diet for their many healthful benefits.

Leaves can be used as an abundant flavorful herb, salad, or soup ingredient. Stalks can be used as a vegetable like celery. Roots of mature plants can be used to impart their aromatic flavor to dishes or used in medicinal or cosmetic preparations.

Dosage

From [Very Well Health](#), 4 to 8 grams daily is an estimated dosage. The root used to make a tea at 2 to 3 grams of lovage root to 1 cup of hot water. Steep for 10 to 20 minutes and drink up to 3 times a day. Lovage tincture may be taken up to 2 milliliters up to 3 times a day.

Lovage, incorporated into the diet or used as a flavoring, is [generally recognized as safe](#), GRAS, by the FDA.

How To Preserve Lovage

- **Leaves:** Harvest leaves in abundance in early spring. You can dry them, but they don't retain very much flavor. They do freeze particularly well. Submerge leaves briefly in ice-cold, salted water. Allow to drain dry. Toss leaves into a food processor. Blend to a loose, fragrant herby mixture. Pack lightly into canning or upcycled glass jars.

Label jars with date and herb names and place them in the freezer. Use within 6 to 12 months. I do this process with many spring leafy herbs. Sometimes I blend it with many other herbs. Fennel, dill, angelica, and parsley are a wonderfully refreshing mix to use with lovage. You will get rave reviews for salads such as tabouli!

- Stems can be preserved by pickling. Candied lovage stems were a particular treat in times gone by. I have not experienced either of these, but they certainly seem worth a try.
- Roots of lovage can be dried. Thoroughly wash roots. Slice into thin pieces and dry in a cool dark place with excellent air circulation. Or, use a food dehydrator.
- **Seeds:** Collected seeds can be stored to use as a spice like celery seed. Simply ensure the seed is clean and dry and place it in paper envelopes or clean glass spice jars. Collected seed can, of course, be used to grow more lovage. Germination rates are usually low, so plant lovage seed in abundance for best results.

Related: [How To Make A Scalable Self-Sustaining Greenhouse](#) (Video)

What Plants Resemble Plant?

Warnings And Cautions

When lovage is incorporated into the diet or used as a flavoring, it is [generally recognized as safe](#), GRAS, by the FDA.

With any new ingredient do a small skin test by placing a small amount of crushed plant parts on the skin and waiting 24 hours. Any reaction such as itchiness or hives may be an indication of sensitivity.

Always check with your healthcare provider before starting new herbal remedies. Particularly if you are pregnant, nursing, or taking medications.

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