



**For the week of
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No lovage lost with home-grown herb

I was at a nursery a while back and came across a package of seeds for an herb called "lovage." I had never heard of it before. What is it?

Everyone could use a little lovage. This perennial herb was once thought of as a love potion in Greek and Roman times, but has taken a less romantic role in modern-day cooking. It is commonly used in southern and central Europe, but remains an unusual ingredient in other parts of the world.

Lovage, a member of the carrot family, can be used for seasoning food and as a salt substitute in many dishes. Lovage looks and smells like celery, but is a much larger plant, at times growing higher than 6 feet tall. It has bright green hand-shaped leaves and stems with hollow ridges.

The plant comes up in early spring and blooms with small, yellow flowers in mid- to late-summer.

Lovage can be used in almost any dish where you would use celery or parsley, but if you try it, be careful how much you use: A little lovage can go a long way. The leaves of the strong-flavored lovage plant can be used in salads, soups and teas while

the stalks can be eaten raw or cooked like a vegetable. It is often used in soups and stews.

Cooks familiar with the herb say lovage is especially good for use in potato and pasta dishes — it gives anything with a carbohydrate base a big boost in flavor.

As well as adding flavor to your food, lovage is high in vitamin C. However, lovage is so unusual in this country that it's not listed in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Nutrient Database, so it's hard to tell just how much vitamin C you'd get in a serving.

Fresh lovage is difficult if not impossible to find in stores, and dried or powdered forms are often available only at health food stores and gourmet markets. If you decide you want to try lovage, gardening experts say it is easy to grow from seed. The best time to sow lovage seed is in autumn. The perennial comes up in the spring and grows throughout the season.

Lovage will grow in both shade and sun and tends to be a hardy plant if well-cared for. The seeds can be found at specialty herb nurseries.

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