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How to Grow Lovage Plants: The Complete Herb Guide



Harvesting the herb lovage (*levisticum officinale*)

Photo Credit: VH-studio/Shutterstock

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Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Lovage

By [Lauren Landers](#)

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What's not to love about lovage? This old-timey, edible herb tastes like a mix of parsley and celery, but it thrives in hot weather, grows well in pots and bigger beds, and is much *bee-loved* by bees. Not to mention, lovage is one of the few edible crops that grow perennially in most areas, and its easy care needs will leave you smitten!

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Like carrots and parsley, lovage is an Umbellifer plant native to the Mediterranean region and produces airy, yellow flowers in summer that pollinators can't resist. Some growers cultivate lovage purely as an ornamental or as a companion plant to draw beneficial insects and pollinators into veggie beds. However, lovage is most commonly grown for edible use and harvested for its stems, seeds, roots, and feathery leaves, which taste like celery with a mild, anise-like twist.



Pollinators love the yellow flowers of lovage! Credit: Nahhana

Lovage leaves are particularly prized in southern European fare, and they can be harvested early and used as tender salad greens or later and cooked into stews, soups, and more. Since lovage leaves look and feel like parsley or celery greens,

a hard time keeping parsley or celery
plants happy.



Lovage plant (*Levisticum officinale*)
growing in the garden. Credit: Lubos
Chlubny

Of course, one of the best things about growing lovage is that it grows perennially in Zones 3 and up and is tolerant of sun and light shade. Plus, it thrives in roomy pots or larger gardens, and it's relatively pest-proof, too. Just remember that mature plants can stretch over 6 feet tall, so you'll need some room to grow them!

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PLANTING

Lovage can be grown from seeds or nursery starts. However, these plants are so productive that you may only need to purchase a single nursery-started plant to keep your kitchen flush with all the fresh lovage you need!

Growing Lovage from Nursery Starts

- Plant potted lovage outdoors in late spring or early summer.
- Choose a sunny or partly shaded location with well-draining soil and plenty of room for lovage to spread out. If

...more information on how to plant lovage

least 12 inches wide, and fill it with a rich potting mix.

- Prep garden soil by adding compost. Then, dig a hole that's slightly larger than your plant's root ball, remove the lovage from its nursery pot, and position the plant in the hole.
- Backfill the planting hole with soil, firm the soil around the plant's stems, and water well. Keep watering newly planted lovage regularly until it's well-established!
- If you're growing multiple plants together, space plants 18 to 24 inches apart in rows positioned 3 feet from each other.



Young garden lovage in the spring.
Credit: Fotografie-Schmidt

Growing Lovage from Seeds

- Lovage seeds can be directly planted

- Cold stratifying lovage seeds before planting can improve germination rates. To do this, simply place lovage seeds on a damp paper towel in a sealed and labeled plastic baggy and store the seeds in your fridge for 2 weeks!
- After stratifying, plant lovage seeds in soil about 6 to 8 weeks before your last frost date.
- Fill pots or seedling trays with pre-moistened seed starting mix, scatter lovage seeds thickly across the soil, and cover them with a light dusting of potting soil or sand. Move the seeds under grow lights and keep the soil consistently moist until the seeds sprout in about 10 to 14 days.
- Once the seedlings are a few inches tall and have 4 true leaves, thin them out by cutting the weakest plants off at the soil line or carefully transplanting extra seedlings into their own pots.
- When the weather warms and the seedlings are 6 to 8 inches tall, harden the seedlings off for 1 to 2 weeks and

GROWING

Lovage plants grow relatively slowly, and it takes a few years for them to reach their maximum height. However, once lovage plants are established in your garden, they're ultra-easy to care for and need minimal attention!

Light

Although lovage can grow in light shade, these plants are more productive in full sun locations that receive at least 6 to 8 hours of light per day.

Water

Newly planted lovage needs to be watered regularly, but established plants may only need water during dry spells. For best results, provide these plants with 1 inch of water per week and keep their soil covered with mulch. Potted lovage needs a little more water than lovage grown in garden beds, but don't water these plants

Fertilizer

Mixing compost into your soil before planting can give lovage a boost, but these plants generally don't need fertilizer. If you want to show your lovage a little extra love, apply 1 to 2 inches of compost around your plants once a year in spring or fall.

Seasonal Care

Lovage is impressively cold hardy, but young plants shouldn't be planted outdoors too early. While lovage leaves die back in cold weather, these perennial plants should produce a new flush of growth when the weather warms.

Applying mulch around your plants before winter and cutting dead stems back before spring is all the winter care lovage needs!

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If you want your plants to produce more leaves, harvest or prune lovage regularly throughout the growing season, and pinch away lovage flowers before they open so leaves don't turn bitter. However, if you want to collect your own lovage seeds or let lovage plants self-sow, leave those flowers and seeds in place!



Lovage (*Levisticum officinale*) seed close-up. Credit: HHelene

Propagation

Lovage can be propagated from root division, but most gardeners grow from seed. Depending on your gardening style, you

- Wait for lovage flowers to fade and produce tiny, fennel-like seeds.
- When the seeds are brown and fully ripe, shake them off into a paper bag, or harvest the entire seedhead and place it upside-down in a perforated paper bag.
- Leave the top of the paper bag open and store the bag in warm, dry spot with good airflow for a week or two so the seeds get even drier.
- Shake the fully dried seeds free and discard the old seedheads.
- Store lovage seeds in a labeled spice jar or paper envelope in a cool, dry spot until you're ready to plant them!

HARVESTING



Cutting fresh lovage (*levisticum*) in the garden. Credit: Simon Kadula

ting or pinching off a few leaves as needed. Feel free to take larger harvests as your plants grow, but never gather more than 1/3 of your plant's stems in one go. Harvesting lovage regularly keeps plants productive and encourages them to produce more leafy growth!

Although most gardeners grow lovage for its edible leaves, seeds can be harvested in late summer to early autumn for eating or planting, and edible lovage roots can be harvested in winter too. If desired, lovage stems can also be "blanched" during the growing season to make them taste a little more like celery. Simply wrap the growing stems two-thirds of the way up with paper or burlap and leave this material in place for a few weeks before harvesting.

Storing Lovage

Fresh lovage can be stored in the fridge in a perforated plastic bag or in a glass filled with a few inches of water—just like fresh flowers. For longer storage, freeze lovage

dehydrator or your oven set on its lowest setting will preserve the color and taste of the leaves better than hang drying.

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PESTS/DISEASES

While lovage plants are hardy and usually problem-free, you should still be on guard for a few potential pests!

- **Leaf miners** are the most common lovage pests. These tiny, flying insects lay eggs on lovage plants, which hatch

but pinching off and destroying affected leaves can keep leaf miner issues from spreading.

- **Slugs and snails** sometimes target young lovage plants, but they're less interested in mature lovage.

Companion planting with alliums and hand-picking slugs and snails off your lovage after dark should solve slug issues!

WIT AND WISDOM

- According to traditional lore, lovage is associated with love and beauty and it's said to act as an aphrodisiac when it's used as a face or hand wash!
- The name "lovage" is derived from the word "love-ache." Interestingly, "ache" is the Medieval word for "parsley!"

HERBS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lauren is a gardener, writer, and public speaker with over a decade of experience helping others learn about gardening, homesteading, and sustainable living. [Read More from Lauren Landers](#)

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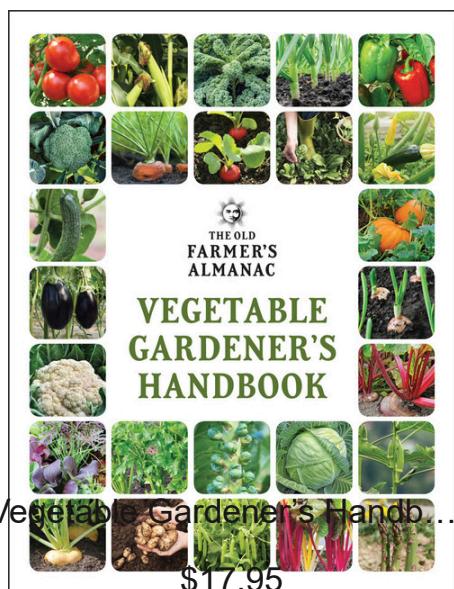
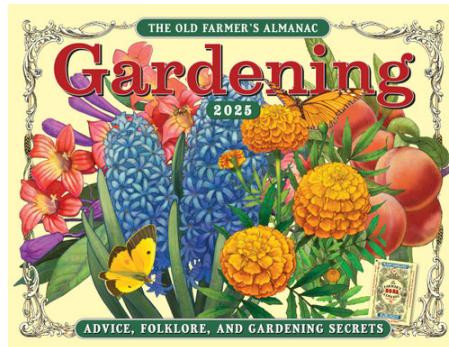
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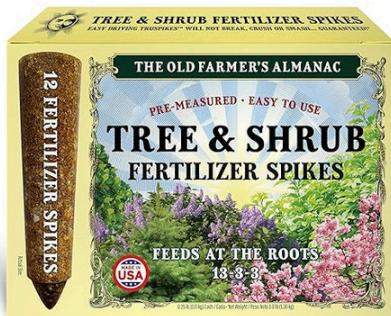
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