PLANT FACT SHEET

Nasturtium officinale W. T. Aiton

GENUS *Nasturtium* **FAMILY** Brassicaceae

COMMON NAMES Watercress

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Seeds, Herb, Spice, Vegetable

The leaves and stems are eaten raw or cooked and have a spicy flavour. They are also fried.
Cooking should be used if the water in the stream is not pure and clean.
The seed can be germinated to produce sprouts.
The seeds can be ground to make a mustard flavouring.

DESCRIPTION

A cabbage family herb. It is a small leafy plant that grows in water and lasts for several years. It grows 30 cm high and has runners 2.5 m long. It has hollow stems and roots freely from the nodes. It branches freely. The leaves consist of 3 to 7 pairs of small leaflets then a larger leaflet at the end. The flowers are small and white and grow grow in a cluster. Flowers are not always produced and need days with more than 12 hours of sunlight to form. A small narrow curved seed pod about 2 cm long can develop. It grows attached to the banks of streams.

HABITAT

This is a temperate climate crop. It is common in tropical highland creeks especially those flowing off limestone hills. (pH 6.5-7.5) It needs to be in running water. In the tropics it occurs from about 1000 m up to at least 2900 m altitude. It grows in streams, ditches, lakes, swamps, marshes from near sea level to 3700 m altitude in China. In Argentina it grows from sea level to 4,100 m above sea level. It grows in wetlands. It suits plant hardiness zones 6-10. Tasmania Herbarium. In Yunnan. In Sichuan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It is grown from cuttings planted along the edges of clear running water. Cuttings of 10-15 cm long are suitable. The plant has roots along the stem at the node and cuttings quickly form roots in water. A spacing of 30 cm is suitable. This small plant keeps living for many years once established. It can also be grown from seeds. Plants can float on the water. It will not tolerate drying out. Watercress has a high phosphate requirement.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Harvesting can occur 4 to 6 weeks after planting. Regular picking encourages branching and increases production. Tips 5-10 cm long are harvested. This can be repeated every 4-6 weeks.

NOTES

It is high in iodine.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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