PLANT FACT SHEET

Lactuca serriola L.

GENUS *Lactuca* **FAMILY** Asteraceae

COMMON NAMES Prickly lettuce, Compass Plant

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Seeds - oil, flower, Vegetable

The leaves need to be used when young. The leaves are used as a vegetable. They can be used in salads or cooked.
The seeds can be used to produce edible cooking oil. It must be refined before eating.
The plant accumulates lactucarium towards flowering which is mildly narcotic. The flower heads have been eaten but are bitter.
Boiled prickly lettuce is boiled and has the taste of asparagus. It is used in salads and soups.

DESCRIPTION

A herb. It grows 1-2 m high. It takes 2 years to complete its life-cyle. It has a well developed taproot. The leaves have deep lobes and are bluish-green with a whitish bloom. They have prickly edges. The lower leaves form a ring near the ground. They are large and the higher leaves are smaller. The leaves are 3-18 cm long. The flowering stem is stiff and 1.5 m high. The flowers are small and yellow. There are prickles on the midrib of the leaves. The spiny stems ooze milky sap when cut. Variety scariola has leaves and lobes that are more narrow than Lactuca serriola.

HABITAT

It is a temperate plant. It grows on waste ground and can be on stony or rocky land and sand dunes. It can grow in arid places. In western China it grows between 500-2,000 m above sea level. Tasmania Herbarium.

NOTES

There are about 20 Lactuca species. It can contain bitter compounds that have a sedative effect.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

REFERENCES

Al-Fatimi, M. A., Wild Edible Plants Traditionally Collected and Used in Southern Yemen. Research Square. University of Aden. p 19

Alrhmoun,M., et al, 2025, Diachronic changes in local food heritage: the ethnobiology of wild foods in central Tuscany. Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine (2025) 21:48

Ambasta, S.P. (Ed.), 2000, The Useful Plants of India. CSIR India. p 312

Ari, S., et al, 2015, Ethnobotanical survey of plants used in Afyonkarahisar-Turkey. Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine 11:84

Baydoun, S., et al, 2023, Wild leafy Vegetables: A potential source for a traditional Mediterranean food from Lebanon. Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems. 6:991979

Beckstrom-Sternberg, Stephen M., and James A. Duke. "The Foodplant Database." http://probe.nalusda.gov:8300/cgi-bin/browse/foodplantdb. (ACEDB version 4.0 - data version July 1994) (As Lactuca scariola)

Benitez, G., et al, 2023, Wild Edible Plants of Andalusia: Traditional Uses and Potential of Eating Wild in a Highly Diverse Region. Plants 2023, 12, 1218 p 14

Bianchini, F., Corbetta, F., and Pistoia, M., 1975, Fruits of the Earth. Cassell. p 50 (As Lactuca scariola)

Bindon, P., 1996, Useful Bush Plants. Western Australian Museum. p 164

Biscotti, N. & Pieroni, A., 2015, The hidden Mediterranean diet: wild vegetables traditionally gathered and consumed in the Gargano area, Apulia, SE Italy. Acta Societatis Botanicorum Poloniae 84 (3): 327-338

Biscotti, N. et al, 2018, The traditional food use of wild vegetables in Apulia (Italy) in the light of Italian ethnobotanical literature. Italian Botanist 5:1-24

Blamey, M and Grey-Wilson, C., 2005, Wild flowers of the Mediterranean. A & C Black London. p 466

Bodkin, F., 1991, Encyclopedia Botanica. Cornstalk publishing, p 613

(As Jasonia glutinosa)

Brouk, B., 1975, Plants Consumed by Man. Academic Press, London. p 113 (As Lactuca scariola)

Brown, D., 2002, The Royal Horticultural Society encyclopedia of Herbs and their uses. DK Books. p 250

Bussman, R. W., et al, 2016, A comparative ethnobotany of Khevsureti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Tusheti, Svaneti, and Racha-Lechkhumi, Republic of Georgia (Sakartvelo), Caucasus. Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine (2016) 12:4

Bussman, R. W., et al, 2021, Unity in diversity—food plants and fungi of Sakartvelo (Republic of Georgia), Caucasus. Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine (2021) 17:72 p 6

Cent. pl. II:29. 1756 (Amoen. acad. 4:328. 1759)

Cheifetz, A., (ed), 1999, 500 popular vegetables, herbs, fruits and nuts for Australian Gardeners. Random House p 71

Cribb, A.B. & J.W., 1976, Wild Food in Australia, Fontana. p 123

Curtis, W.M., 1963, The Students Flora of Tasmania Vol 2 p 389

Dashorst, G.R.M., and Jessop, J.P., 1998, Plants of the Adelaide Plains & Hills. Botanic Gardens of Adelaide and State Herbarium. p 154

Diaz-Betancourt, M., et al, 1999, Weeds as a future source for human consumption. Rev. Biol. Trop. 47(3):329-338

Dobriyal, M. J. R. & Dobriyal, R., 2014, Non Wood Forest Produce an Option for Ethnic Food and Nutritional Security in India. Int. J. of Usuf. Mngt. 15(1):17-37

Dogan, Y., et al, 2004, The Use of Wild Edible Plants in Western and Central Anatolia (Turkey). Economic Botany 58(4) pp. 684-690

Dogan, Y., 2012, Traditionally used wild edible greens in the Aegean Region of Turkey. Acta Societatis Botanicorum Poloniae 81(4): 329-342

Dolina, K. & Luczaj, L., 2014, Wild food plants used on the Dubrovnik coast (south-eastern Croatia) Acta Soc Bot Pol 83(3):175–181

Dretakis, M. et al, 2012, Flora and Fauna Biodiversity in an ancient olive grove in Crete (Greece) in Calabrese G. (Ed.) Study on Biodiversity in Century-Old Olive Groves. CIHEAM - Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari. p 94

Duke, J.A., 1992, Handbook of Edible Weeds. CRC Press. p 118 (As Lactuca scariola)

Elias, T.S. & Dykeman P.A., 1990, Edible Wild Plants. A North American Field guide. Sterling, New York p 104

Ertug, F., 2000, An Ethnobotanical Study in Central Anatolia (Turkey). Economic Botany Vol. 54. No. 2. pp. 155-182

Ertug, F, Yenen Bitkiler. Resimli Türkiye Florası -I- Flora of Turkey - Ethnobotany supplement

Esperanca, M. J., 1988. Surviving in the wild. A glance at the wild plants and their uses. Vol. 2. p 160

Facciola, S., 1998, Cornucopia 2: a Source Book of Edible Plants. Kampong Publications, p 40 (Also as Lactuca scariola)

Gabrielian, E. & Zohary, D.: Wild relatives of food crops native to Armenia and Nakhichevan. – Fl. Medit. 14: 5-80. 2004. – ISSN 1120-4052.

Geraci, A., et al, 2018, The wild taxa utilized as vegetables in Sicily (Italy): a traditional component of the Mediterranean diet. Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine (2018) 14:14

Gunes, S. et al, 2018, Survey of wild food plants for human consumption in Karaisali (Adana-Turkey). Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge. Vol. 17(2), April 2018, pp 290-298

Hedrick, U.P., 1919, (Ed.), Sturtevant's edible plants of the world. p 365 (As Lactuca scariola)

Full reference list (53 more) at https://www.echocommunity.org/en/resources/f0e2c6a7-096a-4585-a0f4-02c4a93e51d7

PROVIDED BY **Food Plants International**

French, B.R. & Maynard, A.R. Food Plants International Database. Food Plants International

LICENCE CC BY-NC-SA 3.0

ONLINE FACT SHEET https://www.echocommunity.org/en/resources/f0e2c6a7-096a-4585-a0f4-02c4a93e51d7