

# Cress



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## Scientific Classification and Etymology

Cress (*Lepidium sativum*) is a member of the mustard family or Cruciferae family. Cruciferous vegetables are named after the Greek cross, because cruciferous vegetable flowers resemble the cross. The Cruciferae family includes weeds and crop plants grown for food.<sup>1</sup> The most commonly cultivated cress variety is called garden cress or peppergrass.

## Historical Importance

Cress is one of the first known leafy vegetables to be consumed. The Romans and Ancient Egyptians were known to eat watercress for various health reasons.<sup>2</sup> Garden cress is often grown inside because it grows so quickly.<sup>3</sup>

## Horticulture and Plant Specifics

As mentioned earlier cress has a flower that resembles a cross. Four uniform petals make up the cross-like structure that confirms its inclusion in the cruciferae family. The

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<sup>1</sup> Kiple, Kenneth F. and Kriemhild Conee Ornelas. *The Cambridge World History of Food and Drink*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1765.

<sup>2</sup> Kiple, Kenneth F. and Kriemhild Conee Ornelas. *The Cambridge World History of Food and Drink*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1765.

<sup>3</sup> Vlimorin-Andrieux, MM. *The Vegetable Garden: Illustrations, Descriptions, and Culture of the Garden Vegetables of Cold and Temperate Climates*. (California: Ten Speed Press), 206-212.

cruciferae family encompasses a wide array of species and therefore takes on a number of different physical forms.<sup>4</sup>

#### Watercress

*Nasturtium officinale*. Watercress grows in shallow moving water.<sup>5</sup> Watercress is a perennial plant meaning it comes back season after season or it grows continuously.

#### Persian Broadleaf cress

*Lepidium Sativum*. Persian Broadleaf cress is an annual plant that acts like a perennial because it does drop new seeds and a new plant grows the next year.<sup>6</sup> The leaves of the Persian broadleaf cress are actually not described as broad at all but are in fact narrow.

#### Shallot cress

*Lepidium campestre*. One variety of shallot cress is called “mahantongo.” This variety was created by the Germans in Pennsylvania during the 1820s. Shallot cress gets its common name from resembling the taste of shallots or garlic. This specific species is ideal because of its ability to withstand cold climates, it can be grown in the winter, even under snow. Another variety of shallot cress is called “common pepper grass” and originates from Europe.<sup>7</sup>

### Cultivation

Persian Broadleaf cress should be harvested when they are still in small radial clumps.<sup>8</sup> Radial leaves don't grow vertically on a stem but grow from a common central point. The seeds of Persian broadleaf press can be easily stored, the seeds grow in pods and one can easily detach a mature pod and place it upside down in a paper bag.<sup>9</sup> After three months the seeds are properly dried and by shaking the bag they will fall out of the pod and should be kept in a tightly sealed jar.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kiple, Kenneth F. and Kriemhild Conee Ornelas. *The Cambridge World History of Food and Drink*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1765.

<sup>5</sup> Kiple, Kenneth F. and Kriemhild Conee Ornelas. *The Cambridge World History of Food and Drink*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1765.

<sup>6</sup> Weaver, William Woys. *Heirloom Vegetable Gardening: A Master Gardener's Guide to Planting, Growing, Seed Saving, and Cultural History*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 313-318.

<sup>7</sup> Weaver, William Woys. *Heirloom Vegetable Gardening: A Master Gardener's Guide to Planting, Growing, Seed Saving, and Cultural History*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 313-318.

<sup>8</sup> Weaver, William Woys. *Heirloom Vegetable Gardening: A Master Gardener's Guide to Planting, Growing, Seed Saving, and Cultural History*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 313-318.

<sup>9</sup> Weaver, William Woys. *Heirloom Vegetable Gardening: A Master Gardener's Guide to Planting, Growing, Seed Saving, and Cultural History*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 313-318.

<sup>10</sup> Weaver, William Woys. *Heirloom Vegetable Gardening: A Master Gardener's Guide to Planting, Growing, Seed Saving, and Cultural History*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 313-318.

Garden Cress is an extremely easy plant to grow. They require no specific type of soil and are usually ready just a few weeks after planting.<sup>11</sup>

## Nutrition

All cruciferous vegetables contain beta-carotene and vitamin C. In addition to these vitamins cruciferous vegetables contain other essential “nonnutritive chemicals” that are important in one’s diet. These chemicals include, indoles, flavones, and isothiocyanates and are thought to prevent different cancers and tumor growths.<sup>12</sup>

## Medicinal Uses

Some people believe that watercress is good for one’s blood, can stimulate sexual desire, treat a child’s cough, diminish scars and freckles, and take care of diarrhea<sup>13</sup>.

## Culinary

Watercress is often found on salads, soups, and sandwiches.<sup>14</sup> Shallot cress which is grown in the winter is often found taking the place of chives.<sup>15</sup> Garden cress has quite a strong flavor which has led to its use as a condiment.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Botany.com “Lepidium – curled cress, garden cress, peppergrass” <http://www.botany.com/lepidium.html>  
Hillclimb Media 1996-2008.

<sup>12</sup> Kiple, Kenneth F. and Kriemhild Conee Ornelas. *The Cambridge World History of Food and Drink*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1765.

<sup>13</sup> Kiple, Kenneth F. and Kriemhild Conee Ornelas. *The Cambridge World History of Food and Drink*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1765.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, Andrew F. *Food and Drink in America*. (Oxford: University Press, 2004), I. 612.

<sup>15</sup> Weaver, William Woys. *Heirloom Vegetable Gardening: A Master Gardener’s Guide to Planting, Growing, Seed Saving, and Cultural History*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 313-318.

<sup>16</sup> Vlimorin-Andrieux, MM. *The Vegetable Garden: Illustrations, Descriptions, and Culture of the Garden Vegetables of Cold and Temperate Climates*. (California: Ten Speed Press), 206-212.