

Garlic Mustard *Alliaria petiolate*

What's in a name?

Garlic Mustard is often found growing along the margins of hedges, giving rise to the old British folk name of Jack-by-the-hedge. Other common names include Garlic Root, Hedge Garlic, Sauce-alone, Jack-in-the-bush, Penny Hedge and Poor Man's Mustard. The genus name *Alliaria*, "resembling Allium", refers to the garlic-like odour of the crushed foliage and it is derived from the Latin name for garlic.

Botany & Ecology

Whilst a member of the cress family, Garlic Mustard is the only species that has the unmistakable smell of garlic. This native herbaceous biennial can grow up to 48" (120cm) tall and have stalked leaves which are hairy on the underside. The lower leaves are heart shaped and form a dense pillow or rosette while the upper leaves are more triangular.



Garlic Mustard flowers between April and June and the small white flowers have a rather unpleasant aroma, which attracts midges and hoverflies, although the flowers usually pollinate themselves. In June the pale green caterpillar of the Orange Tip butterfly (*Anthocharis cardamines*), uses the long green seed-pods as camouflage.

Culinary Uses

Garlic Mustard is one of the oldest discovered spices to be used in cooking in Europe. Evidence of its use was found from archaeological remains located in the Baltic, dating back to 6100-5750BC. The plant has long been used as a flavouring in sauces, which alludes to the nickname, 'poor man's mustard'.

In the 17th century it was recommended as a flavouring for salt fish and lamb. The young leaves are still used in France and Italy in salads to add a mild garlic flavour.



Folk Medicine

Garlic Mustard was once used medicinally as an antiseptic or diuretic (see glossary). Monks running infirmaries within an abbey used it to promote sweating as an antidote against all 'pestilential fevers'. It was also used to treat bronchial complaints and worms. In the 16th century the juices were ingested to alleviate the pain brought on by kidney stones and also used as a mouth and throat wash to cure ulcers. During the 17th century, the leaves were made into an ointment after being crushed and boiled and then applied to leg ulcers. Its use was common among herbalists until the early 19th century but since then, its use has died out.

*Please note, readers should take advice from a qualified doctor or herbalist before using plants as a cure for ailments.