

Dock *Rumix crispus/obtusifolius*

What's in a name?

The name Dock is applied to a widespread range of broad-leaved wayside weeds. Docks were formerly assigned to the Lapathum family. This name is derived from the Greek word 'lapazeinto', which means 'to cleanse', an allusion to the medicinal virtues of these plants as purgatives. The medicinal qualities may also be a link to the common name of 'doctor leaf' used in the past in East Anglia.



Botany & Ecology

The obtusifolius (round leaved) Dock and the Crispus (yellow or curled leaf) dock both have stout stems which can reach up to 3' (90cm) tall and leaves which grow up to 12" (30cm) long. Docks are perennial plants growing from taproots and they are most often found in neglected, disturbed ground like open fields and along roadsides. Usually, they grow on a range of soils except the most acidic. Research has shown that soils high in nitrogen or low in potassium favour docks.

This plant flowers between June and October. The flowers appear as numerous small, green florets arranged in whorled spikes at the ends of the stem. One plant can produce up to 60,000 seeds annually, which can wind pollinate as the plant is an hermaphrodite.

In the UK, broad-leaved dock is a host for the potato eelworm (*Ditylenchus destructor*). Docks also serve as alternative hosts for the bean aphid and mangold flies (*Pegomya hyoscyami*) and they encourage subterranean larvae such as the swift moth (*Korscheltellus lupulina*).

Broad-leaved dock is particularly high in magnesium and has significant traces of phosphate and potassium. It is said that cattle fed on the herbage containing docks do not suffer bloating.

Culinary & General Uses

The leaves have been used for a long time in cooking particularly during hard times. However, the amount consumed must be regulated as they contain oxalic acids which will create kidney stones.

The leaves are best picked when very young and can be eaten raw or cooked in a stew. They are high in vitamins and they were used as a supplement to prevent scurvy. The agricultural community recognised the cooling properties of leaves and often farmers used to wrap the butter in them before taking it to market. In addition, leaves were used as a liner in tobacco pouches to keep the contents moist.

Folk Medicine

Throughout the 20th century, Dock roots were often boiled and the liquid drunk to purify the blood and to cure boils. The liquid was also rubbed on insect bites and many other skin rashes. Whilst there is no scientific evidence that proves that rubbing a Dock leaf on a nettle rash will eliminate the problem, this practice is largely carried out around the world. Some recommend applying saliva to the leaf first for the enzymes to release some of the anti-inflammatory properties held within it.

The leaves have also been used to wrap around minor wounds to stem the bleeding and modern herbalists use *R. crispus* to treat constipation and arthritis.

