

# CROP PROFILE

## LOVAGE

*Levisticum officinale*  
Member of the Apiaceae family



### **History**

Lovage is a perennial herb native to the Mediterranean region. It has been cultivated for centuries as a culinary and medicinal plant and is now grown widely in temperate regions around the world.

### **Climate Needs**

Lovage tolerates full sun to light shade but is most productive in locations receiving at least 6–8 hrs of sunlight per day. Newly planted lovage requires regular watering, while established plants need water only during dry periods. Provide approximately 1 inch of water per week.

### **Lovage Description**

Lovage is a large, long-lived perennial that produces tall, sturdy stems and airy yellow flower umbels in summer. Plants grow relatively slowly and may take several years to reach full size, but once established, they are extremely hardy, low-maintenance, and productive. Lovage thrives in open garden spaces or large containers where it has room to spread. Mature plants can grow to substantial sizes, making them well-suited to larger gardens rather than small beds.

### **Soil**

Lovage grows best in rich, well-drained soil with good moisture-holding capacity and a pH of 6.0 to 7.5. Prior to planting, incorporate compost to improve soil structure and fertility.

### **Seeding**

Lovage can be grown from seed or nursery starts. Because plants are highly productive and long-lived, a single established plant is often sufficient. Transplant lovage outdoors in late spring or early summer. Prepare planting sites by amending soil with compost and digging a hole slightly larger than the root ball. Set plants in place, backfill with soil, press firmly around plant, and water thoroughly. Water regularly until plants are well established. When planting multiple lovage plants, space them 18–24 inches apart within rows, with rows spaced approximately 3 ft apart to allow adequate airflow and room for growth. Lovage seeds may be direct-sown outdoors, but starting seeds indoors in spring improves establishment. Cold stratification enhances germination. After stratification, sow seeds indoors 6–8 weeks before the last frost. Scatter seeds on pre-moistened seed-starting mix and lightly cover with soil or sand. Maintain consistent moisture and provide light. Seeds typically germinate within 10–14 days. Thin seedlings once they develop four true leaves, leaving the strongest plants. When seedlings reach 6–8 inches tall, harden them off for 1–2 weeks before transplanting into beds or containers.

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## ***Pest & Disease Management***

Lovage is relatively pest-resistant and generally problem-free. Leaf miners are the most common pest and may create silvery tunnels on leaves; affected foliage can be removed and destroyed to prevent spread. Slugs and snails may damage young plants but rarely affect mature ones. Hand removal and companion planting with alliums can help reduce slug pressure.



## Highlights

Lovage is highly cold-hardy. Above-ground growth dies back in winter, but plants regrow vigorously in spring. Cut back dead stems before spring growth resumes and apply mulch before winter for added protection.

## ***Fertility***

Lovage has modest fertility requirements. Compost is typically sufficient to meet plant nutrient needs. Incorporate compost into the soil before planting, and apply an additional 1–2 inches of compost around plants once per year in spring or fall if desired. Supplemental fertilizers are generally unnecessary.

## ***Weed Control***

Maintain weed-free growing areas, especially while plants are young. Mulching with organic material helps suppress weeds, conserve soil moisture, and support long-term plant health.

## ***Harvest***

Lovage leaves may be harvested once plants reach about 8 inches tall. Harvest by cutting or pinching stems as needed, taking no more than one-third of the plant at a time. Regular harvesting promotes vigorous, leafy growth. To maintain leaf quality, pinch off flower buds before they open. If seed production or self-sowing is desired, allow flowers to mature. Lovage seeds are ready for harvest when flower heads dry and seeds turn brown. Collect seeds by shaking them into a paper bag or harvesting entire seed heads and drying them further in a warm, well-ventilated location. In addition to leaves, lovage seeds can be harvested for culinary use or planting, stems may be blanched for a celery-like flavor, and roots can be harvested in winter if desired.

## ***Cleaning & Storage***

Store harvested lovage seeds in labeled paper envelopes or glass jars in a cool, dry location. Fresh leaves may be refrigerated in a perforated plastic bag or stored upright in water. For long-term storage, lovage leaves and seeds can be frozen, dried, or preserved in oil. Drying in a food dehydrator or low-temperature oven preserves flavor and color better than air-drying.

## ***Risk***

Lovage can spread aggressively once established and may become invasive if unmanaged. Regular harvesting, removal of flower heads, and thoughtful placement help prevent unwanted spread.

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Rating any crop's production opportunity or risk is subjective and depends on the region where the crop is to be raised. Genetic advancement for pathogen tolerance and adverse weather condition has been more significant for popular, high seed sales crops such as corn and soybeans. The below table lists some of the issues of producing specific crops and helps guide your process of selecting your cropping choice.

**Average rating: 3.4**

Issue	1	2	3	4	5
Seed availability				X	
Scouting requirements					X
Drought tolerance				X	
Waterlogged soil tolerance			X		
Disease pressure				X	
Wildlife concerns				X	
Yield swings				X	
Harvest ability			X		
Field loss			X		
Market demand			X		
Soil regeneration			X		
Residue value				X	
Storability				X	
Benefit for following crop			X		

1- very low 2- low 3- average 4- moderately high 5- very high

**Seed availability** – Price, lead time, and required lot size are consideration for these issues

**Scouting requirements** – What frequency does someone need to look at the crop?

**Drought tolerance** – Rainfall patterns are requiring crops go longer between rainfall events.

**Waterlogged soil tolerance** – Rainfall events tend to produce higher volumes than historical averages.

**Disease pressure** – Plant stress has increased with the rise of daytime temperatures

**Wildlife concerns** – Deer, rabbits, voles, resident geese, and others can destroy fragile crops.

**Yield swings** – How predictable will the income be when this crop goes to market?

**Harvest ability** – Do we need plans B & C if adverse conditions affect the harvest?

**Field loss** – How much will be left in the field and can we monetize field loss?

**Market demand** – Does this crop have an elastic delivery window and are there timing penalties?

**Profitability** – Is there potential for higher margins needed for a shrinking land base?

**Soil regeneration** – Does this crop support the next crop?

**Residue value** – What remains after the target crop? Can we monetize the residue?

**Storability** – How long can we hold this crop? Will quality be challenging to maintain?