

Meet Your Plants Curly Dock



Common Names: Curly dock, yellow dock, sour dock

Botanical Name: *Rumex crispus*

Botanical Meaning: "Curled sorrel" referring to the leaves

Family: Polygonaceae (smartweeds, knotweeds, buckwheats)

Edible Parts: Shoots, stalks, seeds, leaves

Medicinal Parts: Roots, leaves

Growing Seasons: Spring, summer, fall

Precautions: It should be eaten in moderation due to its high oxalic acid content (as does spinach). Avoid if suffering from kidney stones or related ailments.

Plant Description

In its first year, curly dock starts as a small basal rosette of dark green, oval to lanceolate leaves, growing up to 6" long and 1" across with pointed ends. The young leaves have smooth edges, but as they age, they become crisped and wavy. A unique feature of curly dock and others in its family is the papery sheath (ocrea) that forms on the leaf stem as it emerges from the root or stalk. In its second year, the plant shoots up a rigid flower stalk that can reach up to 4' tall, with alternate leaves along the stalk that branch out as the plant flowers. Clusters of green flowers bloom at the ends of stems maturing into brown paper-husked, three-angled brown seeds.

Edible Uses

The young leaves of curly dock can be eaten raw in salads or cooked like spinach. They have a slightly sour, lemony flavor. It's important to harvest them when they are tender, before the plant flowers, as they become more bitter with age. Older leaves can be boiled in several changes of water to reduce their oxalic acid content and bitterness. They can be used in soups, stews, or sautéed as a side dish. The seeds of curly dock are high in protein and can be collected, dried, and ground into a flour. This flour can be mixed with other flours to make bread, pancakes, or other baked goods. The main stalk can be peeled and the inner flesh eaten raw or cooked up in a stir-fry.

Medicinal Uses

Energetics: Cooling, slightly drying

Uses: Skin conditions, constipation, anemia

Preparations: Tincture, salve, decoction, syrup, food

The curly dock root is the star of this medicinal herb and the most commonly used part of the plant for treating ailments. It's a valuable herb for constipation, offering gentle yet effective relief without the uncomfortable side effects of harsher laxatives. It stimulates the liver and aids in waste removal, making it beneficial for promoting healthy digestion which in turn leads to healthier skin. Herbalists have long used curly dock to build blood in cases of anemia, as it not only contains iron but also helps the body absorb iron more efficiently. Historical records show humans have been using its leaves as a poultice to alleviate nettle stings for hundreds of years.

Fun Facts

Each plant can produce over 30,000 seeds. These seeds can lay dormant for 50 years!

"Big Foot"



Curly Dock