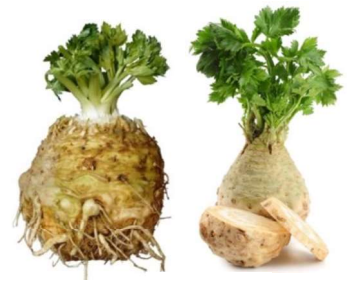


Celery and Celeriac



Common celery

Celery exists in 3 forms, the original wild celery has thin, hollow green stalks, it is sometimes called *smallage* (an archaic name for wild celery); from this wild celery, two cultivated varieties have been bred: the common celery (*var. dulce*) with thick solid green or white stems, and celeriac (*var. rapaceum*), an European variety with thick, turnip-like stem base and



Celeriac

stalk the same as that of the wild form.

Native to southern Europe and the near East, wild celery was well known to the ancients who used it in medicine and social celebrations. The ancient Greeks gave celery wine to the winning athletes and crowned them with celery garlands. Due to its bitterness and toxicity in large amount, wild celery was rarely used for culinary purpose, the earliest recorded of its use as a condiment was in the 1600s in France where the plant was referred to as *ache*; this wild celery is known today as 'smallage', a corruption of the Old French word *ache* (pronounced "ash") for celery, small *ache* became smallage. Later, the Italians, determined to breed out the bitterness of the wild variety, developed milder strains for culinary use, this led to the cultivated variety *Apium graveolens dulce* which we know today as celery, with thick, juicy and stringless stalks, and *Apium graveolens rapaceum*, known as celeriac which has edible turnip-shaped base and small green stems. So, celery and celeriac are basically the same plant, with celery being a variety cultivated for its stalks and celeriac for its root (technically not a root, but a swollen base of stems that form a round, knobby mass). They both have the taste of celery, and both can be used either cooked or raw.



Wild celery

Wild celery has always been a common plant in Europe, growing wild especially near the sea. Strong in flavour and bitter in taste, it is still in use now but more often as a flavouring than a vegetable. It can be bought easily in Europe, especially in France, known as *célérie à couper* (chopping celery), and in recent times in some specialty greengrocers here in Australia. Chop up and add to soups and stews, it gives a better and stronger flavour than does the cultivated variety.



Chinese celery

Cultivated celery (common celery) comes in stalks loosely clustered into a head, it is a bright-green, crunchy, full-flavored vegetable, high in sodium and water, making it a refreshing and versatile addition to soups, stocks, and salads. Many people would not consider their kitchen well-stocked without at least a few stalks of celery on hand. Some gardeners like to blanch the green variety before harvesting by wrapping black polythene or newspaper around the stems. Empty milk cartons also work well. Some like to earth up the growing plant, this practice encourages the growth of the stems. The more recently bred 'self-blanching' variety does not need to be earthed up, thus saving considerable labour. The Chinese, who had been using celery as early as the 5th century, developed their own cultivated variety (*Apium graveolens var. secalinum*), their celery, eaten for its large leaves as well as the stalks, very rarely eaten raw, is thinner, juicier and stronger in flavour.

Celeriac, also known as turnip-rooted celery, knob celery or celery root, is harvested for the round swollen stem (often technically incorrectly referred to as a root) instead of the green shoots. Celeriac is excellent in stews and soups, makes a good gratin and also a silky purée. Celeriac is popular in Eastern and Northern European regions as a winter vegetable commonly used in salads, soups, casseroles and stews, it has the texture of potatoes. Boil it, steam it, roast it, mash it – anything you can do with a potato, you can also do with celeriac. Raw celeriac has a crunchy texture, making it a good addition to salads and coleslaws. Being quite popular on the mainland of Europe but for some reason celeriac did not make much headway in Australia until recent times, thanks to European migrants, it has now become easily available in greengrocers and supermarkets.

In temperate climates, wild celery is also grown for its seeds which are actually very small fruits, these seeds yield an essential oil that is used in the perfume industry. Celery seeds can also be used as a flavouring or spice, either as whole seeds or ground. Celery salt is a mixture of ground seeds and salt.

Ah, the humble stalk of celery, hyped and derided as the ultimate diet food! Dieters often eat celery stalks, believing that the actual work involved in chewing and digesting the food burns more calories than the food itself offers. Celery's diuretic action certainly lends some credence to its use in a weight loss plan, as it would tend to eliminate water weight, but don't be fooled by the much-touted claim that celery is a 'negative-calorie' food, lost water weight usually returns, unfortunately, the loss is only a transient loss. All that said, when eaten celery in its whole form, its fibre and water density may help fill you up, making you less likely to want more calories, at least in the short term!

Celery juice is one of the latest health trends (just take a quick browse through stories posted on social media), claiming it's a 'miracle juice' with lots of medical benefits that one supposedly gets from drinking it. Drink it if you enjoy it, (it is delicious, very refreshing!) but think twice before taking stock in all the claims, most of them are not confirmed scientifically, some might even be false!