

Q: I would like to grow Watercress. Can I just put it in my pond?

A: Watercress is the common name for *Nasturtium officinale*, although it is sometimes listed under *Roripa* and *Radicula*. Watercress is called an emergent perennial, a plant grown for the snappy tasting leaves and stems used in salads and as garnishes. The compound leaves are smooth, and the stems have three to twelve round leaflets on plants that will reach from 0.5 m by 1m. . The white flowers are pollinated by bees and flies, and are found clustered at the ends of the stems from March until October. The slightly curved pods that form on the stalks contain small, round seeds. Roots form from the nodes found on the underwater stems and are be used for easy propagation. The plant is found throughout North America, Europe, Asia and South America, and may have been introduced from Europe as it has a long history dating back to Roman times. The leaves contain high concentrations of vitamins, protein and minerals.

Watercress is aquatic, preferring cool, running water with a pH of 7.2. If you want to grow this plant, you will need a source of clean, flowing water in good light. If you have a clean stream on your property, you can plant watercress in a shallow area with a slight slope, either from seedlings you have started or from rooted cuttings.

Watercress can be grown in small quantities in containers. Plant the seeds in a regular potting mix and keep moist but not covered with water. After the seedling appear, fill the containers with water so that the leaves are just above the surface. If you can provide a slight flow of water, the plants will be happier. The cleanliness of the water is very important as Watercress grown in contaminated water, whether from chemicals or animal manures, can make you very ill. The plants can survive frosts, although the leaves above water will get damaged. Leaves can start to be harvested in about three weeks, and the plants can live for as long as ten years.