



National Watercress Week

17-24th May

It contains more vitamin C than oranges, more calcium than milk and more iron than spinach. It is brimming with fifteen essential vitamins and minerals. And so in celebration of the versatile green stuff, this May is National Watercress Week! Why not encourage your class or even your work colleagues to eat more watercress? We've compiled an A-Z of reasons why watercress is so good for you and therefore, why it should be used in children's pack lunches across the country. And while you're at it, why not give a watercress history lesson to your class adapting our Watercress Through the Ages timeline to suit the needs of your class?

Watercress A-Z

A is for Vitamin A

Watercress is a rich source of Vitamin A converted from beta carotene with 80gs providing 42 per cent of the Recommended Daily Allowance. It is necessary for healthy eyesight, skin and immune function.

B is for the Brassica Family

Watercress is a member of the healthy Brassica family, and is related to broccoli, cabbage, brussel sprouts, cauliflower, rocket and radish and should not be confused with mustard and cress.

C is for Cancer Protection

Eating watercress daily can significantly reduce DNA damage to blood cells, which is considered to be an important trigger in the development of cancer. The research, carried out by the University of Ulster, Coleraine, and published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition (February 2007), found that in addition to reducing DNA damage, a daily portion of watercress also increased the ability of those cells to resist further DNA damage caused by free radicals.

D is for Detox

Watercress is a favourite detox ingredient containing mustard oils which boost and regulate the activity of the liver's enzymes.

E is for Eye Health

Watercress is a source of nutrients associated with the maintenance of normal vision and eye health, including vitamin A, C and E.

F is for Folate

The most commonly known folate is folic acid. They help reduce the risk of Spina Bifida during pregnancy and works with vitamin B12 to help keep the circulation healthy. Folates are also important for healthy red blood cells and nerve function.

G is for Glucosinolate Family

Watercress has high levels of a type of glucosinolate called glucose-nasturtium which releases phenylethyl isothiocyanate, or PEITC. PEITC gives the plant its unique peppery flavour and in scientific studies has been shown to increase the body's potential to resist certain carcinogenic (cancer causing) agents.

H is for Hampshire

Hampshire is renowned as the UK's centre of watercress farming, providing an abundance of crystal clear chalk spring water in which to cultivate the plant.

I is for Iron

Gram for gram, watercress contains more iron than spinach. Watercress is

also rich in vitamin C, a better source than oranges, which is known to increase the absorption of iron.

J is for John Gerard

The herbalist John Gerard extolled the virtues of watercress as a remedy for scurvy in 1636. No doubt in those days it was far easier to come by than oranges – a foreign extravagance.

K is for Kardamon

The ancient Greeks called watercress kardamon; they believed it could improve their intellect, hence their proverb "eat watercress and get wit".

L is for Lutein

Watercress contains Lutein that acts as an antioxidant, which can 'mop up' potentially damaging free radicals. Lutein is considered to be very important for eye health.

M is for Ministry of Health

Watercress was a staple ingredient in school dinners. Several experiments conducted by The Ministry of Health in the 1930s concluded that watercress was excellent for promoting children's growth. It was the most nutritious of all the foods they tested, apart from raw kale.

>>>

N is for 'Not just a bit on the Side'

Despite its noble history, watercress sales declined with the import of the other trendy salad leaves. In 2003 British watercress producers responded with a promotional campaign called "Not just a bit on the Side."

O is for 'On the Go Food'

In the Victorian period street sellers would buy watercress from Covent Garden Market and form it into bunches, which was eaten in the hand, like an ice cream cone - the first 'on the go food'.

P is for Peppery

The peppery leaves and succulent stalks act as a stimulant to the digestion and to the taste buds. The



Romans called it "nasturtium," which translates as "twisted nose."

Q is for Quercetin

Watercress contains Quercetin, a powerful antioxidant which helps to protect the body against damaging free radicals. Studies also suggest it has anti-inflammatory effects.

R is for Rothwell

Steve Rothwell is known as the industry's "Doctor of Watercress". He has an Applied PhD in Nutritional & Environmental Physiology of Watercress, gained at The University of Bath in 1983.

S is for Watercress Sandwiches

The watercress industry continued to thrive during both World Wars when the country had to rely on home grown produce and watercress sandwiches at "high tea" became almost a national institution.

T is for Toothache

In the 19th Century, watercress was thought to be a cure for toothache.

U is for Underrated

After years of being dismissed as nothing more than a garnish, watercress is at last achieving the recognition it deserves as the King of salad leaves.

V is for Versatile

Watercress is incredibly versatile: you can use it in anything from soups and sandwiches, to salads and stir-fries.

W is for Weight Control

Watercress is low in fat and calories with 18 calories per 80g portion. Liz Hurley is said to drink up to six cups of watercress soup a day when she's on one of her famous diets.

X is for Xmas

Decorate the Xmas turkey platter with garnishes of watercress – it's great for mopping up the gravy and meat juices.

Y is for Youthful

17th Century philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon claimed watercress could "restore a youthful bloom" to women.

Z is for Zeaxanthin

Watercress contains Zeaxanthin, an antioxidant that can 'mop up' potentially damaging free radicals. They are found in high concentrations in the lens and retina (especially the macular) of the eye and studies suggest they may play a role in keeping these parts of the eye healthy.

To find out more about National Watercress week, to obtain more information about the health benefits of watercress and to download some great recipe ideas, log on to: www.watercress.co.uk

Watercress Through the Ages

circ. 400s BC

- On the island of Kos, in Ancient Greece, Hippocrates, the father of medicine, is said to have located his first hospital beside a stream so that he could grow a plentiful supply of watercress to help treat his patients.

c.600s - 700 AD

- The Anglo Saxons believed watercress could prevent baldness and 'spring clean' the blood.

c.1500s

- The first attempts at commercial cultivation of watercress are reported to have been by a Nicholas Meissner in Erfurt in Germany.

c.1600s

- Herbalist Nicholas Culpepper claimed "watercress potage is a good remedy to cleanse the blood in spring and consume the gross humours winter hath left behind."

1808

- The first British watercress farm opened in Northfleet, near Gravesend, in Kent.

1837-1901

- Watercress was a staple ingredient of the Victorian working class diet. It was often eaten in sandwiches at breakfast, though in poorer homes it was eaten on its own which it earned it the nickname "poor man's bread."

1865

- As demand increased, the development of the railway and the opening of the line to Alresford, in Hampshire, allowed the watercress industry to spread and capitalise on the abundance of undeveloped land and clear spring water. Fresh watercress could be picked in the afternoon, taken by horse and cart to Alresford station that evening and go on sale in Covent Garden Market in the early hours of the following morning.

1890

- A prominent figure in the watercress industry in the late 1800s and early 1900s was Eliza James, who because of her near monopoly on the London watercress trade was nicknamed "The Watercress Queen." It was reported that she was the biggest owner of watercress farms anywhere in the world, distributing over 50 tons of watercress a weekend at the time of her death in 1927. The Daily Mirror reported: 'For a woman by her own unaided efforts to have amassed £20,000 three to four times over by selling watercress is surely one of the most wonderful romances of business London has ever known.'

1914-1945

- During both the First and Second World Wars watercress thrived when the country had to rely on home grown produce and watercress sandwiches at "high tea" became almost a national institution.

1960

- The 1960s saw the lifting of import restrictions and the introduction of more exotic looking salad leaves, followed by the closure of many branch railways which had a severe effect on the watercress industry and sales started to plummet.

1970

- Watercress is reputed to be an aphrodisiac and in the 1970s an Arab prince is said to have had special consignments flown out from the UK, presumably to help him satisfy his harem!

2008

- 2008 marked the 200th anniversary of the first watercress farm opening in Britain.

2009

- Sees the 6th annual Watercress Festival on the 17th May 2009 in Alresford, Hampshire which kicks off National Watercress Week (17-24 May 2009) to celebrate the start of the British watercress season.