

Lovage Pro-Tips & Popcorn Seasoning

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PRO-TIPS

Celery-forward with a citrusy finish, lovage is easy to love (though the name is a Latin derivative of "from Liguria", where the herb was grown extensively). It can be propagated by seed or by dividing the root clump, grows briskly but doesn't invade, and reaching nearly 6 feet tall benefits from being whacked back all summer long. If you're thinking about starting your own herb garden, this is the gateway plant for you; if you're ready to expand an existing one, lovage plays well with others and invites experimentation in the kitchen along with many purported medicinal uses.

Look for lovage early spring through summer in the farmers markets; its delicate temperament makes it unsuitable for commercial distribution. Use it where you'd sprinkle parsley, chop it into tuna, chicken, or egg salad, puree it into creamy soups and seafood stews; potato dishes almost universally benefit from its brightness. Many cordial and syrup recipes can be found online. This lovage and walnut pesto recipe freezes well and can be swirled into soups and other dishes all year round.

Cutting the center stalks of lovage when they're about as big around as a Sharpie prevents the plant from going to seed and getting bitter (though you might want to let a few seed pods form for harvesting in the fall, and use them where you might add coriander or celery seed).

Bonus - this task will reward you with an aromatic, compostable straw! Lovage stems are completely hollow and impart a slight, herbaceous note that elevates seltzers, lemonade, bloody marys and in particular, gin and vodka tonics.

Cut stems can be wrapped in a damp paper towel and stored in the refrigerator for up to a week.

In addition to freezing pesto, lovage is easy to preserve by drying: its broad, thin leaves dehydrate quickly. If you've grown it without pesticides you can harvest leaves in the morning when the essential oils (a.k.a. flavor) are at their peak and skip the washing (if you do wash them be sure to lay them out on a towel or spin dry first). Try one or more of these herb drying methods.



Lovage Popcorn Seasoning

One of our favorite ways to appreciate the full flavor of dried lovage is on popcorn. Inspired by [the Sideyard Farm and Kitchen](#), this recipe uses more oil than you're probably used to, producing a crisper kernel and a deep flavor that eliminates the need for butter, highlighting the herb-forward seasoning. We use garlic powder, not salt, leaving the salting to the individual devourers. Of course you can sprinkle it on other things like ripe tomatoes, ramen, dips, garlic bread, in cottage cheese or on soups and stews.

Lovage Seasoning Mix (for 5-6 cups popped corn)

With your fingers or in a blender thoroughly mix together:

2 teaspoons brewer's yeast

1 cup loose, dried lovage leaves, pulverized down to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup or about 5 grams

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon garlic powder (optional)

Blitzing these in a blender isn't necessary, but the finer the powder the more evenly it coats the popcorn. If you're going to make a big batch this is the way to go: just scale up the recipe by multiplying each ingredient, or try a mortar and pestle or bowl and your fingers for a quick, single batch. These measurements are approximate: you might want more or less of each flavor, but combined they create an umami-rich blend. Depending upon the time of year your lovage might taste stronger or milder, so play around and taste as you go. You can make the seasoning in advance and keep it in a cool, dark place in a glass jar for up to three months. Toss on hot popcorn and enjoy!

Crispy Popcorn

This method is a favorite that highlights our favorite, locally grown popcorn varieties and also keeps it vegan. It produces a unique, crunchy, deep-flavored batch. Since no dairy is added at the end (releasing water) it stays firm and crunchy well into the next day: toss leftovers into a salad or onto a soup as an herbaceous crouton substitute.

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil with a high smoke point (canola, grapeseed, sunflower all work, or use ghee if you miss that buttery flavor)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup popcorn kernels

In a heavy bottom pot or stovetop popper, heat the oil with a couple of the kernels on medium high heat until you hear them pop—then it's time to add the remaining kernels. Cover with a lid, leaving a tiny crack open for the steam to escape but not enough to lose kernels or get splashed with hot oil. With the crack facing away from you, shake it from side to side occasionally—especially if your burner is smaller than your pan—until the popping stops.

This style benefits from sitting a few minutes before scooping into a large bowl and tossing with the lovage seasoning mix and salt if desired.

