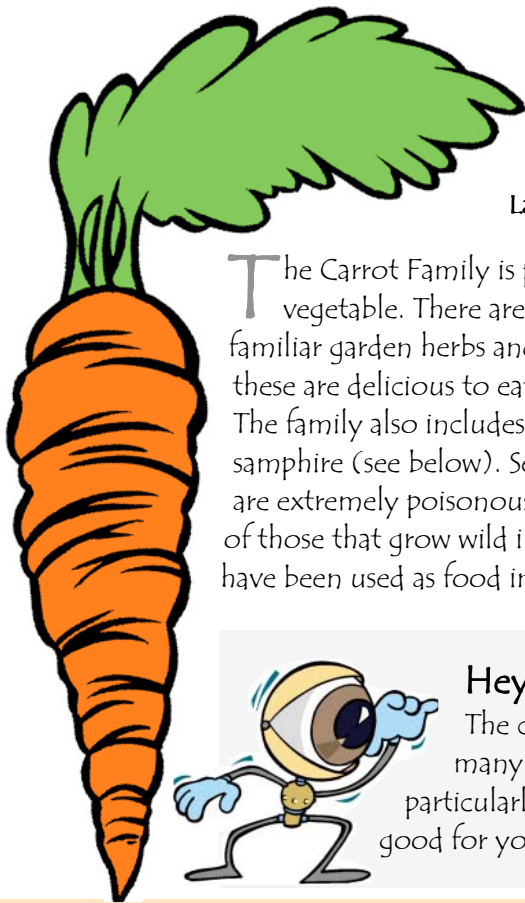


Carrot Family

Latin Family Name: Umbelliferae

Irish Name: Cairéad



The Carrot Family is probably most famous for the long, orange root that we eat as a vegetable. There are as many as 3,000 species in the Carrot Family, and it includes familiar garden herbs and vegetables such as celery, coriander, dill, fennel and parsley. All these are delicious to eat.

The family also includes many wild flowers such as the wild carrot, hogweed and rock samphire (see below). Several members of the family are extremely poisonous and it is best not to eat any of those that grow wild in Ireland, even though some have been used as food in the past.



Hey, good looking!

The carrot provides us with many vitamins and minerals, particularly Vitamin A, which is good for your eyesight.

What's in a name?

The mostly white or yellow flowers of the Carrot family are individually small but grouped in domed umbrella-shaped clusters or umbels. It is these umbels of flowers that give these plants their Latin family name - Umbelliferae.



Wild Carrot

In summer, the Wild Carrot splashes dry grassland with white. It is a hairy biennial* with tough, erect stems and fern-like leaves. Though most common near and along the coast, it also occurs inland on dry and lime-rich soils. The shop carrot is a cultivated form of this plant, bred for its thick orange roots. (*Biennial = taking two years to complete its life cycle.)



Rock Samphire

Rock Samphire is a seaside plant and is hard to confuse with any other Irish wild flower. It is a low-growing, hairless perennial with green to bluish-green leaves, deeply cut into narrow, pointed lobes. It grows in any rocky crevice, even on walls or piers. Despite the plant's strong oily smell, before the 20th century it was prized as a vegetable, and was usually eaten cooked or pickled.



Hogweed

Hogweed is a coarse, rough-hairy perennial (comes back every year), and is one of the commonest plants of road verges, hedges and rough grassland. It sometimes forms great patches, especially on rich soils on the site of old gardens or farmland. Like several other members of this family, Hogweed has poisonous sap that can blister the skin in sunlight. It has in the past, however, been eaten as a winter green vegetable!



Photos courtesy of Robbie Murphy

Text extracts from "A Beginner's Guide to Ireland's Wild Flowers" by John Akeroyd

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