

Salicornia Herbacea or Glasswort

Related Ingredient: *HYDRASALINOL*

Salicornia Herbacea, or *Glasswort*, comes from the Arab word “*salcoran*” and owes its name to its shape. The successive ridges of which it is formed end in a projecting bud called the “horn of salt”. It is also said the word *Salicornia* comes from the Latin *sal* (salt) and *cornu* (horn), due to the horn shaped branches containing salt.

Synonyms: *Salicornia Europaea*, European *Salicorne*, *Salicorne Herbacée*, *Pickleweed*, *Glasswort*, *Marsh Samphire*



BOTANICAL

Botanical Family: Chenopodiaceae

Salicornia Herbacea is a vivacious coastal plant, annual or biannual and edible. It is an upright or laid down plant, measuring 10 to 40 cm high, glabrous, with a slender root, dark green in colour, sometimes tinged with red during flowering.

The stem is erect, translucent, articulated, fleshy and leafless. It has long ascending branches.

The leaves are opposed, scale-like and fused in pairs in the shape of a sheath.

The flowers, practically invisible, are green, with yellow anthers and generally solitary or in groups of three. Flowering occurs from August to October.

The fruits of an achene type are small and hardly visible.

Salicornia Herbacea germinates at the end of Autumn and stays dormant all Winter until Spring. The first branches form and in mid-Spring the plant will have reached 6 to 8 cm in height. At maturity, it becomes woody (only the ends of the branches remain tender) and can reach 30 to 40 cm high.

Towards the end of August, small flowers appear on both sides of the stems and Glasswort starts to look like heather. Then the seeds form and the plant dries out. After germination, the first seedlings appear during winter and vegetate until the warmth of spring.



BIOTOPE

Salicornia Herbacea is a halophilic plant, i.e. salt-loving and it can grow in high salinity environments. It has developed a number of particular adaptations enabling it to grow on both Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, in low salt to high salt soils. This extraordinary adaptive capability is due to the presence of water and ammonium ion transport mechanisms which play a key role in protecting it against dehydration and high salt levels.

Glasswort grows by itself or in groups on coastlines, in salty marshes and up to the high tide mark. It grows on rocks, sand dunes and so forth.

It withstands the tides well and often forms impressive colonies since soil instability and pounding from the waves means that only a few species manage to take root.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

Glasswort is native to North America, Europe, South Africa and Southern Asia.

In France, *Salicornia Herbacea* is to be found on the shores of the Channel (north west France), the Mediterranean (southern France) or in Corsica (an island off the coast of south east France). Glasswort is a protected species in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, the northernmost part of France.

It is also found in Europe and over a large part of the globe.

HISTORY

In the past, Glasswort ashes were used to produce soap and glass.

Burning Glasswort produces soda, in the form of ashes, then used to make glass. This substance was called *salicor*, *salicore* or *salicorn* in the writings of the time. During the 14th century, glass makers used to move their workshops depending on where the plant was growing, so essential was it to their craft.

MEDICINAL USES

Salicornia Herbacea was also known in the past under the name “pass stone” since it was used to dissolve calculi (kidney stones).

In traditional medicine, *Salicornia Herbacea* is used to treat digestive problems. It contains diuretic and toxin elimination substances: iodine, phosphorous, calcium, silica, zinc, manganese plus Vitamins A, C and D.

It is also known for being effective against:

- Nephritis (generic term for kidney disease).
- Hepatitis in Oriental countries.
- Arteriosclerosis (degeneration of the arteries).
- Hyperlipidaemia (increased lipids in the blood).
- Diabetes.

Some pharmacological experiments have shown that *Salicornia Herbacea* displays anti-oxidant, anti-microbial and anti-inflammatory properties.

DIETARY USES

Salicornia Herbacea can be eaten. The tender and fleshy shoots of young glasswort harvested in May or June, salty and crunchy, can be eaten raw, plain or in a vinaigrette, by itself or in a salad with other ingredients.

As the season goes on, Glasswort becomes a bit bitter and it's preferable to blanch it. A few minutes in boiling water are enough to remove its bitterness and excess salt. It then becomes a vegetable which can be cooked like spinach, served as is or returned to the pan, to go with fish, red or white meat or poultry.

Glasswort can also be cooked as a soup, pickled in vinegar, or used to flavour mustard, mayonnaise, vinegar and so on.



OTHER USES



The roots of *Salicornia Herbacea* stabilise the ground and the branches slow down water currents, promoting sedimentation. The species is sometimes specifically planted for these reasons.

Nowadays, glasswort ash is used to make Aleppo soap, which has been produced since Antiquity solely using natural raw materials.