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for a healthier world*

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## **Polygonatum odoratum - (Mill.)Druce.**

### **Solomon's Seal**

Author	(Mill.)Druce.	Botanical references	17, 200
Family	<a href="#">Convallariaceae</a>	Genus	<a href="#">Polygonatum</a>
Synonyms	<i>Polygonatum anceps</i> - Moench. <i>Polygonatum officinale</i> - All. <i>Polygonatum vulgare</i> - Desf.		
Known Hazards	 The fruits are poisonous[9, 10, 19, 65].		
Range	Europe, including Britain, from Scandanavia south and east to Spain, Siberia, China, Himalayas.		
Habitat	Limestone woods and rocky places[17, 100].		
Edibility Rating	 2 (1-5)	Medicinal Rating	 3 (1-5)

### **Physical Characteristics**



Perennial growing to 0.85m by 0.3m.

It is hardy to zone 4. It is in flower from May to July. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs) and are pollinated by Bees. The plant is self-fertile.

The plant prefers light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils and requires well-drained soil. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils. It can grow in full shade (deep woodland) or semi-shade (light woodland). It requires dry or moist soil.

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## Habitats

Woodland Garden; Dappled Shade; Shady Edge; Deep Shade;

## Edible Uses

Edible Parts: [Leaves](#); [Root](#).

Young shoots - cooked. They can be used as an asparagus substitute[46, 55, 61]. Root - cooked[2, 55, 105, 179]. Rich in starch.

## Medicinal Uses

[Antiperiodic](#); [Antitussive](#); [Cardiotonic](#); [Demulcent](#); [Diuretic](#);  
[Hypoglycaemic](#); [Miscellany](#); [Ophthalmic](#); [Resolvent](#); [Sedative](#); [Tonic](#).

Solomon's seal has been used for thousands of years in herbal medicine. It is used mainly in the form of a poultice and is believed to prevent excessive bruising and to stimulate tissue repair[254]. The root is antiperiodic, antitussive, cardiotonic, demulcent, diuretic, energizer, hypoglycaemic, ophthalmic, resolvent, sedative and tonic[7, 9, 21, 147, 174, 176, 178, 218]. It is used in the treatment of, dry throat, dry coughs and coronary heart disease [176]. The plant is only used in domestic medicine[9]. An infusion is used as a diuretic and stimulant to the metabolism, though no more than 3 cups per day should be taken and only over short periods[9]. It can also be applied externally as a poultice to treat bruises, small wounds etc[7, 9]. It has also been used to remove freckles[9, 21, 174, 176, 178]. The root is harvested in the autumn and can be dried for later use[9]. It should not be used internally except under expert supervision[254].

## Other Uses

None known

## Scented Plants

### Flowers: Fresh

The flowers are sweetly scented[245].

## Cultivation details

Prefers a fertile humus rich moisture retentive well-drained soil in cool shade or semi-shade[200]. Plants are intolerant of heat and drought but tolerate most other conditions[200]. Prefers a dryish soil[10, 19]. Does well in woodlands and copses[1, 19]. Hardy to about -25•c[187]. The rhizomes are long and creeping, the plant forming large colonies[187]. The flowers are sweetly scented[245]. Members of this genus are rarely if ever troubled by browsing deer

or rabbits[233]. The young shoots of most members of this genus are very attractive to slugs[K]. Hybridizes with other members of this genus[200]. A number of named forms have been selected for their ornamental value[187].

## Propagation

Seed - best sown as soon as it is ripe in early autumn in a shady part of a cold greenhouse[200]. Sow stored seed as early in the year as possible. Germination can be slow, they may not come true to type[200] and it takes a few years for them to reach a good size. When they are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and grow them on in a shady position in the greenhouse for at least their first winter. Plant them out into their permanent positions in late spring or early summer, after the last expected frosts. Division in March or October. Larger divisions can be planted out direct into their permanent positions. We have found that it is better to pot up the smaller divisions and grow them on in light shade in a cold frame until they are well established before planting them out in late spring or early summer.

## Links

## References

### [K] Ken Fern

Notes from observations, tasting etc at Plants For A Future and on field trips.

[1] **F. Chittendon.** *RHS Dictionary of Plants plus Supplement.* 1956 Oxford University Press 1951

Comprehensive listing of species and how to grow them. Somewhat outdated, it has been replaced in 1992 by a new dictionary (see [200]).

[2] **Hedrick. U. P.** *Sturtevant's Edible Plants of the World.* Dover Publications 1972 ISBN 0-486-20459-6

Lots of entries, quite a lot of information in most entries and references.

[7] **Chiej. R.** *Encyclopaedia of Medicinal Plants.* MacDonald 1984 ISBN 0-356-10541-5

Covers plants growing in Europe. Also gives other interesting information on the plants. Good photographs.

[9] **Launert. E.** *Edible and Medicinal Plants.* Hamlyn 1981 ISBN 0-600-37216-2

Covers plants in Europe. a drawing of each plant, quite a bit of interesting information.

[10] **Altmann. H.** *Poisonous Plants and Animals.* Chatto and Windus 1980 ISBN 0-7011-2526-8

A small book, reasonable but not very detailed.

[17] **Clapham, Tootin and Warburg.** *Flora of the British Isles.* Cambridge University Press 1962

A very comprehensive flora, the standard reference book but it has no pictures.

[19] **Stary. F.** *Poisonous Plants.* Hamlyn 1983 ISBN 0-600-35666-3  
Not very comprehensive, but easy reading.

[21] **Lust. J.** *The Herb Book.* Bantam books 1983 ISBN 0-553-23827-2

Lots of information tightly crammed into a fairly small book.

[46] **Uphof. J. C. Th.** *Dictionary of Economic Plants.* Weinheim 1959

An excellent and very comprehensive guide but it only gives very short descriptions of the uses without any details of how to utilize the plants. Not for the casual reader.

[55] **Harris. B. C.** *Eat the Weeds.* Pivot Health 1973  
Interesting reading.

[61] **Usher. G.** *A Dictionary of Plants Used by Man.* Constable 1974  
ISBN 0094579202

Forget the sexist title, this is one of the best books on the subject. Lists a very extensive range of useful plants from around the world with very brief details of the uses. Not for the casual reader.

[65] **Frohne. D. and Pf•nder. J.** *A Colour Atlas of Poisonous Plants.* Wolfe 1984 ISBN 0723408394

Brilliant. Goes into technical details but in a very readable way. The best work on the subject that I've come across so far.

[100] **Polunin. O.** *Flowers of Europe - A Field Guide.* Oxford University Press 1969 ISBN 0192176218

An excellent and well illustrated pocket guide for those with very large pockets. Also gives some details on plant uses.

[105] **Tanaka. T.** *Tanaka's Cyclopaedia of Edible Plants of the World.* Keigaku Publishing 1976

The most comprehensive guide to edible plants I've come across. Only the briefest entry for each species, though, and some of the entries are more than a little dubious. Not for the casual reader.

[147] **?** *A Barefoot Doctors Manual.* Running Press 0 ISBN 0-914294-92-X

A very readable herbal from China, combining some modern methods with traditional chinese methods.

[174] **Kariyone. T.** *Atlas of Medicinal Plants.* 0  
A good Japanese herbal.

[176] **Yeung. Him-Che.** *Handbook of Chinese Herbs and Formulas.* Institute of Chinese Medicine, Los Angeles 1985

An excellent Chinese herbal giving information on over 500 species. Rather technical and probably best suited to the more accomplished user of herbs.

[178] **Stuart. Rev. G. A.** *Chinese Materia Medica*. Taipei. Southern Materials Centre 0

A translation of an ancient Chinese herbal. Fascinating.

[179] **Reid. B. E.** *Famine Foods of the Chiu-Huang Pen-ts'ao*. Taipei. Southern Materials Centre 1977

A translation of an ancient Chinese book on edible wild foods. Fascinating.

[187] **Phillips. R. & Rix. M.** *Perennials Volumes 1 and 2*. Pan Books 1991 ISBN 0-330-30936-9

Photographs of over 3,000 species and cultivars of ornamental plants together with brief cultivation notes, details of habitat etc.

[200] **Huxley. A.** *The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening. 1992*. MacMillan Press 1992 ISBN 0-333-47494-5

Excellent and very comprehensive, though it contains a number of silly mistakes. Readable yet also very detailed.

[218] **Duke. J. A. and Ayensu. E. S.** *Medicinal Plants of China* Reference Publications, Inc. 1985 ISBN 0-917256-20-4

Details of over 1,200 medicinal plants of China and brief details of their uses. Often includes an analysis, or at least a list of constituents. Heavy going if you are not into the subject.

[233] **Thomas. G. S.** *Perennial Garden Plants* J. M. Dent & Sons, London. 1990 ISBN 0 460 86048 8

A concise guide to a wide range of perennials. Lots of cultivation guides, very little on plant uses.

[245] **Genders. R.** *Scented Flora of the World*. Robert Hale. London. 1994 ISBN 0-7090-5440-8

An excellent, comprehensive book on scented plants giving a few other plant uses and brief cultivation details. There are no illustrations.

[254] **Chevallier. A.** *The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants* Dorling Kindersley. London 1996 ISBN 9-780751-303148

An excellent guide to over 500 of the more well known medicinal herbs from around the world.

## Readers Comments

### Polygonatum odoratum

**Pia Str•m Sj•berg** Thu Jul 19 2007

I have just returned from a vacation i South Korea. I bought some

teabags with green tea in a 7-eleven in Seoul as a souvenir, and when opening one of the boxes I discovered that the cover of each bag had a photo of Polygonatum odoratum. The content in the bags seem to be dried and finely grinded root, brown and somewhat sticky when wet. After reading the information on this page I think I will save the teabags in the medicine box...

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