

Common Name: **Turnip**

Genus: *Brassica*

Species: *rappa*

Family: Brassicaceae

AKA: Retich, Rapum, Gongulis, Gongule, Gongilida, Golgosium, Turnep



## Historical Uses:

**Medical:** “Turnip [ruba] is more warm than cold, and while it is heavy in a person’s stomach, it is easy to digest. Let whoever wishes to eat it raw remove the exterior rind completely. This is thick and its greenness is harmful to a person. When the rind has been removed, the inner part can be eaten. But it is better cooked than raw and does not bring bad humors. But if at some time a humor rises up into an ulcer, let the person eat some turnip and the ulcer will be checked. But if someone who is congested in his or her lungs eats turnips, cooked or raw, it will torment his or her lungs somewhat because it does not have enough power to resist serious illnesses” (1)

The roote of it being sod is nourshing, yet very windie, and breeding moist and loose flesh, and prouoking to venerie. But the decoction of it is a fomentation of ye gowte and of the Pernoines. But the same of itself, being beaten small and soe applied is good for ye same too. If any hauing made the roote hollow, doe melt ceratum rosaceum therein in hot ashes it is effectuall for exulcerated perniones. But the tender tops of them are eaten sod, and provoke vrine, and the seed of it is good to be put into Antidotes and treacles that cease paine. Being dranck it is good against deadly medicines, and doth prouoke to venerie. But Rapum being pickled in brine, and soe eaten is lesse nourishing, yet it restores the Appetite. (2)

The decoction of turneps is good against the cough and hoarsenesse of the voice, being drunke in the evening with a little sugar, or a quantitie of clarified honey. *Disicorides* writeth, That the turnep it selfe being stamped, is with good successe applied upon mouldie or kibed heeles, and that also oile of roses boiled in a hollow turnep under the hot embers doth cure the same. The young and tender shoots or springs of Turneps at their first coming forth of the ground, boiled and eaten as a sallade prouke urine. The seed is mixed with counter poisons and tracles: and being drunke it is a remedie against poisons. They of the lower countries doe give the oile which is pressed out of the seed,





against the after throwes of women newly brought to bed, and also minister it to young children against the wormes, which it both killeth and driueth forth. The oile washed with water doth allaie the feruent heat and ruggednesse of the skin.” (3)

Gerard makes note that there are various sorts of turnips “some wilde; some of the garden; some with round roots globe fashion; others ovall or peare fashion; and another sort longish or somewhat like a radish: and of all these there are sundry varieties, some being great, and some of a smaller sort.”

In his Herbal, Gerard has two main categories, turnips with substantial roots and those with minor roots referenced as Wilde Turnips.

“Some commend a syrup made with slices of turnips and brown sugar-candy, stratum super startum baked in an oven, a good pectoral, and helpful for coughs and consumptions.” (4)

“Sharpens sight, relieves palsy, is a diuretic, eases gout, and makes an application for old and infected ulcers; the juice clears the sinuses. As a pessary, taken with darnel, it is an emmenagogue, but, taken with its own flowers, is a contraceptive. The seed is a vermifude, clears away freckles, and is an antidote to poison. The leaves cure inflammations, erysipelas, edema, and break open carbuncles. They also heal alopecia, are good for the spleen, laxative, and end laryngitis. Cabbage is a remedy for drunkenness, and is equally effective for overloaded stomachs.”(5)

**Culinary:** “Turnips are much eaten with all sorts of flesh, in the winter season especially, and are a wholesome nourishing root, though somewhat windy, and are more used in the kitchen than the apothecary’s shop; some commend a syrup made with slices of turnips and brown sugar candy.” (6)

**Folklore/Astrology:** “Turnips are deemed under the Moon in Pisces.” (7)



Turnip greens are also eaten as well as the root

“They are warm in the second degree, moist in the first, and are under the dominion of the moon. In the *Doctrine of Signatures*, they are assigned to the care of the spleen, which is indicated by the fact that they have yellow flesh, the color of the spleen’s fluids. In dreams, they are a sign of wasted labor, and if offered to a hopeful lover (in Westphalia), signify that he is unacceptable.” (8)

**Cautions:** “Turnip is more warm than cold, and while it is heavy in a person’s stomach it is easy to digest. Let whoever wishes to eat it raw remove the exterior rind completely.”(9)

---

## Contemporary Uses:

**Parts Used:** Whole plant

**Medicinal:** None found

**Culinary:** The large bulbous is the most common part of the plant consumed however, the upper leaves are also consumed as greens.

**Economic:** Larger varieties are used as cattle fodder. Oil is also obtained by pressing the seeds.

---

**Area of Origin:** India, Europe

**Physical description:** “The turnip hath long rough and greene leaves, cut or snipt about the edges with deepe gashes.” (10).

The root is generally white skinned except a portion which protrudes above the soil, which is red to purple. The interior flesh is white.

**Plant type:** Biennial

**Form:** Erect

**Height:** 1-1.5’

**Flower color:** Bright yellow

**Flowering period:** April

**Soil type/requirements:** Deep, fertile, loose, well-aerated

**Ph:** Slightly acid

**Hardiness zone:** USDA 2-11

**Sun requirements:** Full sun

**Propagation:** By seed in the spring or late summer

---

## Sources

1. Hildegard, p. 83
2. Dioscorides p. 147
3. Gerard p. 232-33
4. Culpepper, p. 187
5. Anderson, p. 57
6. Culpepper p. 187
7. Ibid
8. Anderson p. 57
9. Von Bingen, p. 81
10. Gerard p.231

### **Illustrations/Images:**

1. Fuchs' Herbal, p. 98
2. <http://www.onlyfoods.net/turnip.html>
3. <http://www.diynetwork.com/how-to/outdoors/gardening/growing-turnip-greens>