

Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*)

Common Names: Cocklebur, liverwort, church steeples and stickwort.

Location: North America.

Description: This herb likes lots of sunlight and produces yellow budding flowers in the summer season.

Properties: This is one of the most commonly used herbs for healing wounds. Agrimony is non-toxic and is used

as an astringent.

Uses: Agrimony can be used to cure diarrhea and relaxed bowels. In conjunction with bed wetting, this herb can

be used to stop the irritation of the urinary tract. It can also be used to help treat jaundice and liver problems, as

well as infections.

Doses: This herb is most commonly taken as a tea or tincture.

Warnings: Agrimony can cause an increase in constipation. People with the following health conditions should

not take agrimony: Grave's disease, Hashimoto's thyroiditis, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, Sjogren's syndrome,

or any other autoimmune disease.

Agrimoy

MEDICINAL: An infusion of the leaves is used to treat jaundice and other liver ailments, and as a diuretic. It is also used in treating ulcers, diarrhea, and skin problems. Externally,

a fomentation is used for athlete's foot, sores, slow-healing wounds, and insect bites. Agrimoy is used as an astringent, diuretic, tissue healer, and stops bleeding. It is also used as antibacterial and antiparasitic, and is used for tapeworms, dysentery, and malaria.

MAGICKAL: Agrimony is used in protection spells, and is used to banish negative energies and spirits. It is also used to reverse spells and send them back to the sender. It was believed that placing Agrimon under the head of a sleeping person will cause a deep sleep that will remain until it is removed.

GROWING: Agrimony is grown throughout much of the United States and southern Canada. It is a perennial that reaches 2 to 3 feet tall, prefers full sun and average soils.

Agrimony tolerates dry spellswell.

Also known as

Agrimonia eupatoria L. and/or *Agrimonia procera*, common agrimony, church steeples, cocklebur, philantopos, and stickwort.

Introduction

Agrimony is an herb in the rose family found near hedges and fences throughout England. Bearing yellow flowers with egg-shaped petals on spikes emanating from hairy stems, agrimony exudes a

distinctive, pleasant scent that is usually compared to apricots but isn't as sweet. During Elizabethan period herbalists began to refer to the plant as philanthropos, perhaps because of its beneficent properties as a medicine, or perhaps because its seeds stick to the clothing of passers by, giving them the "gift" of next year's plants.

Constituents

Tannins and flavonoids. A volatile essential oil can be distilled from the stem.

Parts Used

Dried, above-ground parts of the plant, harvested shortly before or during summer flowering.

Typical Preparations

Herb powder in slurry or decoction, herbal tea, or essential oil.

Summary

Agrimony teas are a traditional diuretic, but they are also a traditional treatment for diarrhea. Sipped slowly, the tannins in agrimony tea "tan" or cross-link proteins in the throat to form a barrier against infection and irritation.

The great herbalist Culpepper (1652) recommended agrimony to treat sores by bathing and fomenting them with a decoction of this plant, and added, "The decoction of the herb, made with wine and drunk, is good against the biting and stinging of serpents . . . it also helpeth the colic, cleanseth the breath and relieves the cough. A draught of the decoction taken warm before the fit first relieves and in time removes the tertian and quartian ague.' It 'draweth forth thorns, splinters of wood, or any such thing in the flesh."

Research published as recently as April 2005 tends to confirm Culpepper's use of agrimony to treat various environmental toxins. Agrimony extracts do seem to protect against viral infections in general and hepatitis B in particular, providing the tea is made with boiling, rather than merely hot, water. Agrimony prepared at any temperature may support liver function.

Precautions

There are no contraindications for use of up to 3 grams per day. Taking more than this amount for treating sore throat could aggravate constipation if it exists.

---**Synonyms**---Common Agrimony. Church Steeples. Cockeburr. Sticklewort. Philanthropos.

---**Part Used**---The herb.

---**Habitat**---The plant is found abundantly throughout England, on hedge-banks and the sides of fields, in dry thickets and on all waste places. In Scotland it is much more local and does not penetrate very far northward.

Agrimony has an old reputation as a popular, domestic medicinal herb, being a simple well known to all country-folk. It belongs to the Rose order of plants, and its slender spikes of yellow flowers, which are in bloom from June to early September, and the singularly beautiful form of its much-cut-into leaves, make it one of the most graceful of our smaller herbs.

---Description---From the long, black and somewhat woody perennial root, the erect cylindrical and slightly rough stem rises 1 or 2 feet, sometimes more, mostly unbranched, or very slightly branched in large specimens. The leaves are numerous and very rich in outline, those near the ground are often 7 or 8 inches long, while the upper ones are generally only about 3 inches in length. They are pinnate in form, i.e. divided up to the mid-rib into pairs of leaflets. The graduation in the size and richness of the leaves is noticeable: all are very similar in general character, but the upper leaves have far fewer leaflets than the lower, and such leaflets as there are, are less cut into segments and have altogether a simpler outline. The leaflets vary very considerably in size, as besides the six or eight large lateral leaflets and the terminal one, the mid-rib is fringed with several others that are very much smaller than these and ranged in the intervals between them. The main leaflets increase in size towards the apex of the leaf, where they are 1 to 1 1/2 inches long. They are oblong-oval in shape, toothed, downy above and more densely so beneath.

The flowers, though small, are numerous, arranged closely on slender, terminal spikes, which lengthen much when the blossoms have withered and the seed-vessels are maturing. At the base of each flower, which is placed stalkless on the long spike, is a small bract, cleft into three acute segments. The flowers, about 3/8 inch across, have five conspicuous and spreading petals, which are egg-shaped in form and somewhat narrow in proportion to their length, slightly notched at the end and of a bright yellow colour. The stamens are five to twelve in number. The flowers face boldly outwards and upwards towards the light, but after they have withered, the calyx points downwards. It becomes rather woody, thickly covered at the end with a mass of small bristly hairs, that spread and develop into a burr-like form. Its sides are furrowed and nearly straight, about 1/5 inch long, and the mouth, about as wide, is surmounted by an enlarged ring armed with spines, of which the outer ones are shorter and spreading, and the inner ones longer and erect.

The whole plant is deep green and covered with soft hairs, and has a slightly aromatic scent; even the small root is sweet scented, especially in spring. The spikes of flowers emit a most refreshing and spicy odour like that of apricots. The leaves when dry retain most of their fragrant odour, as well as the flowers, and Agrimony was once much sought after as a substitute or addition to tea, adding a peculiar delicacy and aroma to its flavour. Agrimony is one of the plants from the dried leaves of which in some country districts is brewed what is called 'a spring drink,' or 'diet drink,' a compound made by the infusion of several herbs and drunk in spring time as a purifier of the blood. In France, where herbal teas or *tisanes* are more employed than here, it is stated that Agrimony tea, for its fragrantcy, as well as for its virtues, is often drunk as a beverage at table.

The plant is subject to a considerable amount of variation, some specimens being far larger than others, much more clothed with hairs and with other minor differences. It has, therefore, by some botanists, been divided into two species, but the division is now scarcely maintained. The larger variety, having also a greater fragrance, was named *Agrimonia odorata*.

The long flower-spikes of Agrimony have caused the name of 'Church Steeples' to be given the plant in some parts of the country. It also bears the title of 'Cockeburr,' 'Sticklewort' or 'Stickwort,' because its seed-vessels cling by the hooked ends of their stiff hairs to any person or animal coming into contact

with the plant. It was, Gerard informs us, at one time called Philanthropos, according to some old writers, on account of its beneficent and valuable properties, others saying that the name arose from the circumstance of the seeds clinging to the garments of passers-by, as if desirous of accompanying them, and Gerard inclines to this latter interpretation of the name.

The whole plant yields a yellow dye: when gathered in September, the colour given is pale, much like that called nankeen; later in the year the dye is of a darker hue and will dye wool of a deep yellow. As it gives a good dye at all times and is a common plant, easily cultivated, it seems to deserve the notice of dyers.

Sheep and goats will eat this plant, but cattle, horses and swine leave it untouched.

---History---The name Agrimony is from Argemone, a word given by the Greeks to plants which were healing to the eyes, the name Eupatoria refers to Mithridates Eupator, a king who was a renowned concoctor of herbal remedies. The magic power of Agrimony is mentioned in an old English medical manuscript:

'If it be leyd under mann's heed,
He shal sleepyn as he were deed;
He shal never drede ne wakyn
Till fro under his heed it be takyn.'

Agrimony was one of the most famous vulnerary herbs. The Anglo-Saxons, who called it Garclive, taught that it would heal wounds, snake bites, warts, etc. In the time of Chaucer, when we find its name appearing in the form of Egrimoyne, it was used with Mugwort and vinegar for 'a bad back' and 'alle woundes': and one of these old writers recommends it to be taken with a mixture of pounded frogs and human blood, as a remedy for all internal haemorrhages. It formed an ingredient of the famous arquebusade water as prepared against wounds inflicted by an arquebus, or hand-gun, and was mentioned by Philip de Comines, in his account of the battle of Morat in 1476. In France, the *eau de arquebusade* is still applied for sprains and bruises, being carefully made from many aromatic herbs. It was at one time included in the London Materia Medica as a vulnerary herb, but modern official medicine does not recognize its virtues, though it is still fully appreciated in herbal practice as a mild astringent and tonic, useful in coughs, diarrhoea and relaxed bowels. By pouring a pint of boiling water on a handful of the dried herb - stem, leaves and flowers - an excellent gargle may be made for a relaxed throat, and a teacupful of the same infusion is recommended, taken cold three or four times in the day for looseness in the bowels, also for passive losses of blood. It may be given either in infusion or decoction.

---Constituents---Agrimony contains a particular volatile oil, which may be obtained from the plant by distillation and also a bitter principle. It yields in addition 5 per cent of tannin, so that its use in cottage medicine for gargles and as an astringent applicant to indolent ulcers and wounds is well justified. Owing to this presence of tannin, its use has been recommended in dressing leather.

---Medicinal Action and Uses---Astringent tonic, diuretic. Agrimony has had a great reputation for curing jaundice and other liver complaints. Gerard believed in its efficacy. He says: 'A decoction of the leaves is good for them that have naughty livers': and he tells us also that Pliny called it a 'herb of princely authoritie.' Dioscorides stated that it was not only 'a remedy for them that have bad livers,' but also 'for such as are bitten with serpents.' Dr. Hill, who from 1751 to 1771 published several works on Herbal medicine, recommends 'an infusion of 6 oz. of the crown of the root in a quart of boiling water, sweetened with honey and half a pint drank three times a day,' as an effectual remedy for jaundice. It gives tone to the system and promotes assimilation of food.

Agrimony is also considered a very useful agent in skin eruptions and diseases of the blood, pimples, blotches, etc. A strong decoction of the root and leaves, sweetened with honey or sugar, has been taken successfully to cure scrofulous sores, being administered two or three times a day, in doses of a wineglassful, persistently for several months. The same decoction is also often employed in rural districts as an application to ulcers.

---Preparation---Fluid extract dose, 10 to 60 drops.

In North America, it is said to be used in fevers with great success, by the Indians and Canadians.

In former days, it was sometimes given as a vermifuge, though that use; of it is obsolete.

In the Middle Ages, it was said to have magic powers, if laid under a man's head inducing heavy sleep till removed, but no narcotic properties are ascribed to it.

Green (*Universal Herbal, 1832*) tells us that 'its root appears to possess the properties of Peruvian bark in a very considerable degree, without manifesting any of its inconvenient qualities, and if taken in pretty large doses, either in decoction or powder, seldom fails to cure the ague.'

Culpepper (1652) recommends it, in addition to the uses already enumerated, for gout, 'either used outwardly in an oil or ointment, or inwardly, in an electuary or syrup, or concremented juice.' He praises its use externally, stating how sores may be cured 'by bathing and fomenting them with a decoction of this plant,' and that it heals 'all inward wounds, bruises, hurts and other distempers.' He continues: 'The decoction of the herb, made with wine and drunk, is good against the biting and stinging of serpents . . . it also helpeth the colic, cleanseth the breath and relieves the cough. A draught of the decoction taken warm before the fit first relieves and in time removes the tertian and quartan ague.' It 'draweth forth thorns, splinters of wood, or any such thing in the flesh. It helpeth to strengthen members that are out of joint.'

There are several other plants, not actually related botanically to the Common Agrimony, that were given the same name by the older herbalists because of their similar properties. These are the COMMON HEMP AGRIMONY, *Eupatorium Cannabinum* (Linn.) called by Gerard the Common Dutch Agrimony, and by Salmon, in his *English Herbal* (1710), *Eupatorium Aquaticum mas*, the Water Agrimony- also the plant now called the Trifid Bur-Marigold, *Bidens tripartita* (Linn.), but by older herbalists named the Water Hemp, Bastard Hemp and Bastard Agrimony. The name Bastard Agrimony has also been given to a species of true Agrimony, *Agrimonium Agrimonoides*, a native of Italy, growing in moist woods and among bushes.