

Blue Vervain Herb Profile

Also known as

Verbena hastata and officinalis, Verbena, Common Verbena, Common Vervain, Eisenkraut, European Vervain, Herb of Grace, Herb of the Cross, Holy wort, Juno's Tears, Pigeon weed, Simpler's Joy, Turkey Grass, Swamp Vervain, Mosquito Plant, and Wild Hyssop.

Introduction

The blue vervain or verbena is a creeping perennial of the mint family, bearing numerous, small lilac-blue flowers. The term vervain comes from the Celtic ferfaen, from fer (to drive away) and faen (a stone), referring to the plants historical use in treating kidney stones. Verbena hastata is native to North America and is incredibly similar in appearance and properties to its European cousin Verbena officinalis, whom it is often mistaken for. It grows with wild abandon in the Great Plains section of America, and can be found elsewhere on prairies, in meadows, and open woodlands. The Dakota tribe's name for it translates as "medicine". It was used by Native Americans for colds, coughs, fevers, and stomach cramps.

Constituents

Mucilages, bitters, iridoid glycosides (hastatoside, verbenalin), caffeic acid, essential oil.

Parts Used

The above-ground parts of the plant gathered before flowering, dried.

Typical Preparations

Traditionally used as a tea, but also as a tincture, syrup, foot soak or bath herb, salve or cream.

Summary

Blue vervain is a diuretic used to treat bladder infections, an analgesic tea for hemorrhoid sufferers (usually drunk but also useful as a wash), an expectorant used to treat chronic bronchitis, and an antirheumatic used to relive joint pain. Several of the names for vervain (Herb of the Cross, Herb of Grace, Holy wort) refer to the legend that the wounds of Jesus were dressed with vervain when he was taken down from the cross. This is disputed among biblical scholars as it is not referenced anywhere in modern bibles. It was also used as an ingredient in pagan love potions.

Precautions

Since the herb can stimulate uterine contractions, avoid during pregnancy.

Botanical: *Verbena officinalis* (LINN.), *Verbena hastata*

Family: N.O. Verbenaceae

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---**Synonyms**---Herb of Grace. Herbe Sacrée. Herba veneris.

---**Parts Used**---Leaves, flowering heads.

---**Habitat**---Europe, Barbary, China, Cochin-China, Japan.

---**Description**---In England the Common Vervain is found growing by roadsides and in sunny pastures. It is a perennial bearing many

small, pale-lilac flowers. The leaves are opposite, and cut into toothed lobes. The plant has no perfume, and is slightly bitter and astringent in taste. The name *Vervain* is derived from the Celtic *ferfaen*, from *fer* (to drive away) and *faen* (a stone), as the plant was much used for affections of the bladder, especially calculus. Another derivation is given by some authors from *Herba veneris*, because of the aphrodisiac qualities attributed to it by the Ancients. Priests used it for sacrifices, and hence the name *Herba Sacra*. The name *Verbena* was the classical Roman name for 'altar-plants' in general, and for this species in particular. The druids included it in their lustral water, and magicians and sorcerers employed it largely. It was used in various rites and incantations, and by ambassadors in making leagues. Bruised, it was worn round the neck as a charm against headaches, and also against snake and other venomous bites as well as for general good luck. It was thought to be good for the sight. Its virtues in all these directions may be due to the legend of its discovery on the Mount of Calvary, where it staunched the wounds of the crucified Saviour. Hence, it is crossed and blessed with a commemorative verse when it is gathered. It must be picked before flowering, and dried promptly.

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---**Constituents**---The plant appears to contain a peculiar tannin, but it has not yet been properly analysed.

---**Medicinal Action and Uses**---It is recommended in upwards of thirty complaints, being astringent, diaphoretic, antispasmodic, etc. It is said to be useful in intermittent fevers, ulcers, ophthalmia, pleurisy, etc., and to be a good galactagogue. It is still used as a febrifuge in autumn fevers.

As a poultice it is good in headache, earneuralgia, rheumatism, etc. In this form it colours the skin a fine red, giving rise to the idea that it had the power of drawing the blood outside. A decoction of 2 OZ. to a quart, taken in the course of one day, is said to be a good medicine in purgings, easing pain in the bowels. It is often applied externally for piles. It is used in homoeopathy.

Fluid extract, 1/2 to 1 drachm.

---**Other Species**---

Verbena Jamaicaensis (JAMAICA VERVAIN) grows in Jamaica, Barbados, and other West Indian islands, bearing violet flowers. The juice is used in dropsy and for children as an anthelmintic and cooling cathartic. The negroes use it as an emmenagogue, and for sore and inflamed eyes. As a poultice, with wheat-flour, the bruised leaves are used for swelling of the spleen, and for hard tumours at their commencement.

V. Lappulaceae (BURRY VERVAIN), another West Indian herb, with pale blue flowers, is a vulnerary sub-astringent, being used even for very severe bleeding wounds in men and cattle, especially in Jamaica.

V. hastata (BLUE VERVAIN, Wild Hyssop, Simpler's Joy) is indigenous to the United States, and is used unofficially as a tonic emetic, expectorant, etc., for scrofula, gravel, and worms. A fluid extract is prepared from the dried, over-ground portion.

V. Urticifolia. The root, boiled in milk and water with the inner bark of *Quercus Alba*, is said to be an antidote to poisoning by *Rhus Toxicodendron*.

V. Sinuata. An infusion of the root, taken as freely as possible, is said to be a valuable antisyphilitic.