

Burdock (*Arctium lappa*)

Common Names: Greater burdock, edible burdock, lappa.

Location: This herb can be found in Europe, Asia and North America.

Description: Burdock looks similar to a sunflower plant, but has purple and red flower petals and thorns. The root of this herb is used medicinally.

Properties: This herb can be used as a cleanser for the respiratory, circulatory, lymphatic and urinary tract systems in the body. Use burdock to cleanse your body of bile and toxins.

Uses: Burdock can be used for soar throats, arthritis, gout, sciatica, dandruff, boils, eczema, diabetes, liver disease and cancer.

Doses: You can find this herb in cereal mixes, "goboshi" or "gobo" products in asian grocery stores and as oils, tinctures and teas.

According to Phyllis Balch in *Prescriptions for Herbal Healing* (2002), "Traditional herbalists recommend 2 to 4 milliliters of burdock root tincture per day or 1 to 2 grams three times a day in capsule form."

Warnings: Use burdock cautiously while pregnant.

Burdock

MEDICINAL: Burdock Root is used to treat skin diseases, boils, fevers, inflammations, hepatitis, swollen glands, some cancers, and fluid retention. It is an excellent blood purifier. A tea made of the leaves of Burdock is also used for indigestion. Very useful for building the systems of young women. Helps clear persistent teenage acne if taken for three to four weeks. Used with dandelion root for a very effective liver cleanser and stimulator.

MAGICKAL: Used to ward off all sorts of negativity, making it invaluable for protective amulets and sachets. Add to potpourri in the house.

Also known as

Arctium lappa, gobo, poor man's potatoes, *Arctium*, *Arctium minus*, *Arctium tomentosum*, *Bardana*, *Bardana-minor*, *Bardanae Radix*, *Bardane*, Beggar's Buttons, Burr Seed, Clotbur, Cocklebur, Cockle Buttons, Edible Burdock, Fox's Clote, Great Bur, Great Burdocks, Happy Major, Hardock, Harebur, Lappa, Love Leaves, Orelha-de-gigante, Personata, Philanthropium, Thorny Burr.

Introduction

Considered by many in the North America and Europe as a common weed, burdock is a sturdy biennial plant reaching up to 6 feet (2 m) high, with 18 inch (50 cm) wide leaves forming a rosette at ground level, with smaller versions growing up the thick flowering stem. Burdocks roots grow straight down as much as 3 feet (1M) into the subsoil. In mid-summer, the plant blossoms into a dense array of globular flowers with sticky bracts that cling to passing animals and peoples. These burs were in fact the inspiration behind the invention of Velcro fasteners, when the inventor found them sticking to his dog after an afternoon walk and he realized that objects could be fastened together in the same fashion. The plant grows on roadsides and waste places and around field boundaries throughout Britain, Europe and North America; it is cultivated in Japan, where it is called gobo, and the root is consumed as an everyday vegetable, similar to a carrot.

Constituents

Up to 50% inulin, polyacetylenes, volatile acids (acetic, propionic, butyric, isovaleric), non-hydroxyl acids (lauric, myristic, stearic, palmitic), polyphenolic acids, and tannins.

Parts Used

The washed and dried root, powdered. Also, sometimes the fruits and leaves.

Typical Preparations

It is best taken as a tea in a decoction form. May also be taken as a capsule or extract. In Asia it is used as an ingredient in soups, stews, stir fry's and even eaten raw.

Summary

Native Americans were known to use the whole plant as food, boiling the root in maple syrup (which made it like candy) so that it could be stored for longer periods of time. Noted 17th century herbalist Nicholas Culpepper said that it was good for 'old ulcers and sores', as well a treatment for someone bitten by a rabid dog. In China it is used as an aphrodisiac and for impotence. There is considerable evidence in the scientific literature that burdock root tea is a powerful anti-inflammatory remedy. Its numerous antioxidants protect the liver from toxic chemicals, allowing it to process the body's naturally occurring steroids which are helpful in achieving hormonal balance. A mildly

bitter herb, it stimulates the release of gastric juices and aids digestion. This combination of qualities explains its traditional use in treating acne, eczema, endometriosis, psoriasis, and uterine fibroids. The tea can also be used as a wash to treat skin infections, eczema, and psoriasis.

Precautions

Safe for use as a food or herb.

Botanical: *Arctium lappa* (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Compositae

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---**Synonyms**---Lappa. Fox's Clote. Thorny Burr. Beggar's Buttons. Cockle Buttons. Love Leaves. Philanthropium. Personata. Happy Major. Clot-Bur.

---**Parts Used**---Root, herb and seeds (fruits).

---**Habitat**---It grows freely throughout England (though rarely in Scotland) on waste ground and about old buildings, by roadsides and in fairly damp places.

The Burdock, the only British member of its genus, belongs to the Thistle group of the great order, *Compositae*.

---**Description**---A stout handsome plant, with large, wavy leaves and round heads of purple flowers. It is enclosed in a globular involucre of long stiff scales with hooked tips, the scales being also often interwoven with a white, cottony substance.

The whole plant is a dull, pale green, the stem about 3 to 4 feet and branched, rising from a biennial root. The lower leaves are very large, on long, solid foot-stalks, furrowed above, frequently more than a foot long heart-shaped and of a grey colour on their under surfaces from the mass of fine down with which they are covered. The upper leaves are much smaller, more egg-shaped in form and not so densely clothed beneath with the grey down.

The plant varies considerably in appearance, and by some botanists various subspecies, or even separate species, have been described, the variations being according to the size of the flower-heads and of the whole plant, the abundance of the whitish cottonlike substance that is sometimes found on the involucre, or the absence of it, the length of the flower-stalks, etc.

The flower-heads are found expanded during the latter part of the summer and well into the autumn: all the florets are tubular, the stamens dark purple and the styles whitish. The plant owes its dissemination greatly to the little hooked prickles of its involucre, which adhere to everything with which they come in contact, and by attaching themselves to coats of animals are often carried to a distance.

'They are Burs, I can tell you, they'll stick where they are thrown.'

Shakespeare makes Pandarus say in *Troilus and Cressida*, and in *King Lear* we have another direct reference to this plant:

'Crown'd with rank Fumiter and Furrow-weeds,
With Burdocks, Hemlocks, Nettles, Cuckoo-flowers.'

Also in *As You Like It*:

ROSALIND. How full of briers is this working-day world!

CELIA. They are but *burs*, cousin, thrown upon thee in holiday foolery. If we walk not in the trodden paths, our very petticoats will catch them.

The name of the genus, *Arctium*, is derived from the Greek *arktos*, a bear, in allusion to the roughness of the burs, *lappa*, the specific name, being derived from a word meaning 'to seize.'

Another source derives the word *lappa* from the Celtic *llap*, a hand, on account of its prehensile properties.

The plant gets its name of 'Dock' from its large leaves; the 'Bur' is supposed to be a contraction of the French *bourre*, from the Latin *burra*,

a lock of wool, such is often found entangled with it when sheep have passed by the growing plants.

An old English name for the Burdock was 'Herrif,' 'Aireve,' or 'Airup,' from the Anglo-Saxon *hoeg*, a hedge, and *reafe*, a robber - or from the Anglo-Saxon verb *reafian*, to seize. Culpepper gives as popular names in his time: Personata, Happy Major and Clot-Bur.

Though growing in its wild state hardly any animal except the ass will browse on this plant, the stalks, cut before the flower is open and stripped of their rind, form a delicate vegetable when boiled, similar in flavour to Asparagus, and also make a pleasant salad, eaten raw with oil and vinegar. Formerly they were sometimes candied with sugar, as Angelica is now. They are slightly laxative, but perfectly wholesome.

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---Cultivation---As the Burdock grows freely in waste places and hedgerows, it can be collected in the wild state, and is seldom worth cultivating.

It will grow in almost any soil, but the roots are formed best in a light well-drained soil. The seeds germinate readily and may be sown directly in the field, either in autumn or early spring, in drills 18 inches to 3 feet apart, sowing 1 inch deep in autumn, but less in spring. The young plants when well up are thinned out to 6 inches apart in the row.

Yields at the rate of 1,500 to 2,000 lb. of dry roots per acre have been obtained from plantations of Burdock.

---Parts Used Medicinally---The dried root from plants of the first year's growth forms the official drug, but the leaves and fruits (commonly, though erroneously, called seeds) are also used.

The roots are dug in July, and should be lifted with a beet-lifter or a deep-running plough. As a rule they are 12 inches or more in length and about 1 inch thick, sometimes, however, they extend 2 to 3 feet, making it necessary to dig by hand. They are fleshy, wrinkled, crowned with a tuft of whitish, soft, hairy leaf-stalks, grey-brown externally, whitish internally, with a somewhat thick bark, about a quarter of the diameter of the root, and soft wood tissues, with a radiate structure.

Burdock root has a sweetish and mucilaginous taste.

Burdock leaves, which are less used than the root, are collected in July. For drying, follow the drying of Coltsfoot leaves. They have a somewhat bitter taste.

The seeds (or fruits) are collected when ripe. They are brownish-grey, wrinkled, about 1/4 inch long and 1/16 inch in diameter. They are shaken out of the head and dried by spreading them out on paper in the sun.

---Constituents---Inulin, mucilage, sugar, a bitter, crystalline glucoside - Lappin-a little resin, fixed and volatile oils, and some tannic acid.

The roots contain starch, and the ashes of the plant, burnt when green, yield carbonate of potash abundantly, and also some nitre.

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---Medicinal Action and Uses---Alterative, diuretic and diaphoretic. One of the best blood purifiers. In all skin diseases, it is a certain remedy and has effected a cure in many cases of eczema, either taken alone or combined with other remedies, such as Yellow Dock and Sarsaparilla.

The *root* is principally employed, but the leaves and seeds are equally valuable. Both root and seeds may be taken as a decoction of 1 OZ. to 1 1/2 pint of water, boiled down to a pint, in doses of a wineglassful, three or four times a day.

The anti-scorbutic properties of the root make the decoction very useful for boils, scurvy and rheumatic affections, and by many it is considered superior to Sarsaparilla, on account of its mucilaginous, demulcent nature; it has in addition been recommended for external use as a wash for ulcers and scaly skin disorders.

An infusion of the *leaves* is useful to impart strength and tone to the stomach, for some forms of long-standing indigestion.

When applied externally as a poultice, the leaves are highly resolvent for tumours and gouty swellings, and relieve bruises and inflamed surfaces generally. The bruised leaves have been applied by the peasantry in many countries as cataplasms to the feet and as a remedy for hysterical disorders.

From the *seeds*, both a medicinal tincture and a fluid extract are prepared, of benefit in chronic skin diseases. Americans use the seeds only, considering them more efficacious and prompt in their action than the other parts of the plant. They are relaxant and demulcent, with a limited amount of tonic property. Their influence upon the skin is due largely to their being of such an oily nature: they affect both the sebaceous and sudoriferous glands, and probably owing to their oily nature restore that smoothness to the skin which is a sign of normal healthy action.

The infusion or decoction of the seeds is employed in dropsical complaints, more especially in cases where there is co-existing derangement of the nervous system, and is considered by many to be a specific for all affections of the kidneys, for which it may with advantage be taken several times a day, before meals.

---Preparations---Fluid extract, root, 1/2 to 2 drachms. Solid extract, 5 to 15 grains. Fluid extract, seed, 10 to 30 drops.

Culpepper gives the following uses for the Burdock:

'The Burdock leaves are cooling and moderately drying, wherby good for old ulcers and sores.... The leaves applied to the places troubled with the shrinking in the sinews or arteries give much ease: a juice of the leaves or rather the roots themselves given to drink with old wine, doth wonderfully help the biting of any serpents- the root beaten with a little salt and laid on the place suddenly easeth the pain thereof, and helpeth those that are bit by a mad dog:... the seed being drunk in wine 40 days together doth wonderfully help the sciatica: the leaves bruised with the white of an egg and applied to any place burnt with fire, taketh out the fire, gives sudden ease and heals it up afterwards.... The root may be preserved with sugar for consumption, stone and the lax. The seed is much commended to break the stone, and is often used with other seeds and things for that purpose.'

It was regarded as a valuable remedy for stone in the Middle Ages, and called Bardona. As a rule, the recipes for stone contained some seeds or 'fruits' of a 'stony' character, as gromel seed, ivy berries, and nearly always saxifrage, i.e. 'stone-breaker.' Even date-stones had to be pounded and taken; the idea being that what is naturally 'stony' would cure it; that 'like cures like' (Henslow).