

Celandine Herb Profile

Also known as

Chelidonium majus, Bai Qu Cai, Chelidonii, Chelidonii Herba, Greater Celandine, Schollkraut, Tetterwort, Verruguera.

Introduction

Celandine is a herbaceous perennial in the poppy family, with blue-green, divided leaves and flowers of four yellow petals yielding a pod-like fruit. It has an odd and unpleasant odor and a bitter and pungent taste. It is indigenous to Europe, but is naturalized in the United States. The word celandine is a corruption of the Greek word Chelidon, which translates as "a swallow". This refers to the tradition of Chelidonium, which says that the herb blooms when the swallows arrive, and fades when they depart.

Constituents

Berberine (the same chemical found in goldenseal and Oregon grape root), sanguinarine (also found in blood root), chelidonine, protopine, coptisine, and stylophine. The root has a much greater content of these chemicals than the above-ground parts of the plant.

Parts Used

The above-ground parts of the plant, dried, cut and/or powdered.

Typical Preparations

Can be used to make teas, but more often used as an extract or encapsulation.

Summary

Celandine is most often used for treating gallbladder problems. It stops spasms at the same time it stimulates the production of bile to flush gallstones away. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, celandine is more often used as a pain-relieving cough medication. The sap of the fresh herb is a traditional remedy for warts, as well as producing a buttery yellow dye for yarns and fabrics. In Russia, it is used as an agent against cancer. When burned as incense, celandine is said to be protective and confusing to ones enemies, and reputed to keep away both witches and the police.

Precautions

Not recommended for use while pregnant

Botanical: Chelidonium majus (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Papaveraceae

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---**Synonyms**---Common Celandine. Garden Celandine.

---**Part Used**---Herb.

---**Habitat**---Found by old walls, on waste ground and in hedges, nearly always in the neighbourhood of human habitations.

---**Description**---At first glance, the four petals arranged in the form of a cross make it appear a member of the order *Cruciferce*, but it is not related to these plants, belonging to the same family as the Poppies (*Papaveraceae*) and has, like these flowers, a dense mass of

stamens in the centre of its blossoms.

The Celandine is a herbaceous perennial. The root is thick and fleshy. The stem, which is slender, round and slightly hairy, grows from 1 1/2 to 3 feet high and is much branched; at the points where the branches are given off, it is swollen and jointed and breaks very easily.

The whole plant abounds in a bright, orange-coloured juice, which is emitted freely wherever the stems or leaves are broken. This juice stains the hands strongly and has a persistent and nauseous taste and a strong, disagreeable smell. It is acrid and a powerful irritant.

The yellowish-green leaves, which are much paler, almost greyish below, are very thin in texture, drooping immediately on gathering. They are graceful in form and slightly hairy, 6 to 12 inches long, 2 to 3 inches wide, deeply divided as far as the central rib, so as to form usually two pairs of leaflets, placed opposite to one another, with a large terminal leaflet. The margins (i.e. edges) of the leaflets are cut into by rounded teeth.

The flowers drop very quickly when picked. They are arranged at the ends of the stems in loose umbels. They blossom throughout the summer, being succeeded by narrow, long pods, containing blackish seeds.

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---History---This plant is undoubtedly the true Celandine, having nothing in common with the Lesser Celandine except the colour of its flowers. It was a drug plant in the Middle Ages and is mentioned by Pliny, to whom we owe the tradition that it is called Chelidonium from the Greek *chelidon* (a swallow), because it comes into flower when the swallows arrive and fades at their departure. (The English name Celandine is merely a corruption of the Greek word.) Its acrid juice has been employed successfully in removing films from the cornea of the eye, a property which Pliny tells us was discovered by swallows, this being a double reason why the plant should be named after these birds.

Gerard says:

'the juice of the herbe is good to sharpen the sight, for it cleanseth and consumeth away slimie things that cleave about the ball of the eye and hinder the sight and especially being boiled with honey in a brasen vessell, as Dioscorides teacheth.'

It is one of the twenty-four herbs mentioned in Mercer's *Herbal*.

In the fourteenth century, a drink made with Celandine was supposed to be good for the blood. Clusius, the celebrated Dutch botanist, considered that the juice, dropped into small green wounds, effected rapid cure, and when dropped into the eye would take away specks and stop incipient suffusions. The old alchemists held that it was good to 'superstifle the jaundice,' because of its intense yellow colour.

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---Part Used---The whole herb, collected in the wild state, from May to July, when in flower, and dried. Likewise, the fresh juice.

---Constituents---The alkaloids Chelidonine and Chelerythrin, the latter narcotic and poisonous, also the two nearly allied alkaloids, Homochelidonine A, and Homochelidonine B. In addition, Protopine and Sanguinarine, and a body named Chelidoxanthin, a neutral bitter principle.

---Medicinal Action and Uses---Alterative, diuretic, purgative. It is used in jaundice, eczema, scrofulous diseases, etc., the infusion of 1 OZ. of the dried herb to a pint of boiling water being taken in wineglassful doses. The infusion is a cordial and greatly promotes perspiration. The addition of a few aniseeds in making a decoction of the herb in wine has been held to increase its efficacy in removing obstructions of the liver and gall.

A fluid extract is also prepared, the dose being 1/2 to 1 drachm. Eight to 10 drops of the tincture made from the whole herb, or of the fresh juice, given as a dose three times a day in sweetened water, is considered excellent for overcoming torpid conditions of the liver. In the treatment of the worst forms of scurvy it has been given with benefit.

The orange-coloured, acrid juice is commonly used fresh to cure warts, ringworm and corns, but should not be allowed to come into contact with any other part of the skin.

In milk, it is employed as an eye-lotion, to remove the white, opaque spots on the cornea. Mixed with sulphur, it was formerly used to cure the itch.

An ointment made of the roots and lard boiled together, also of the leaves and flowers, has been used with advantage for piles.

Celandine is a very popular medicine in Russia, where it is said to have proved effective in cases of cancer.

It is still used in Suffolk as a fomentation for toothache.