

Couch Grass (*Elymus repens* or *Agropyron repens*)
Common Names: Quickgrass and dog grass.

Locations: This herb can be found in Australia, North and South America, Europe and northern Asia.

Description: The seeds and rhizomes of this herb are used medicinally.

Properties: This herb is known for being able to heal kidney stones and urinary stones.

Uses: Use couch grass to help treat bronchitis and laryngitis.

Doses: This herb is best in a tea form.

Dog Grass (Couch Grass) root

Also known as

Agropyron repens, Elymus repens, couchgrass, quackgrass, quickgrass, twitchgrass, Agropyron firmum, Couch Grass, Cutch, Dog Grass, Dog-grass, Doggrass, Durfa Grass, Elymus repens, Elytrigia repens, Graminis rhizoma, Quitch Grass, Scotch Quelch, Triticum firmum, Triticum repens, Wheat Grass, Witch Grass.

Introduction

Famous herbalist Nicholas Culpepper wrote that "although a gardener may be of another opinion, a physician holds that a 1/2 acre of dog grass to be worth 5 acres of carrots twice told over." Dog grass is an invasive grass that grows well (many gardeners would say, too well) in regions with warm summers and cool or cold, damp winters. Its name is derived from the simple fact that dogs will eat the grass when they are sick to induce vomiting and cool the blood. You should not grow dog grass in your herb garden unless you are able to keep it well contained.

Constituents

Agropyrene (bactericidal), calcium, fructosan, magnesium, manganese, mannitol, mucilage, phosphorous, potassium, selenium, silicon, sodium, tin, tritacin, zinc.

Parts Used

Rhizome, roots, stems, dried and cut.

Typical Preparations

Taken internally as a tea and also used for baths and irrigation therapy. To make the tea, put 2 teaspoonfuls of the cut rhizome in a cup of water, bring to boiling and let simmer for 10 minutes. This should be drunk three times a day. Typically used with some combination of buchu, corn silk, hydrangea, uva ursi (bearberry), yarrow, and/or cranberries or cranberry juice. Can also be administered as a capsule or extract.

Summary

Dog grass is demulcent, meaning it soothes inflammations of mucosal linings, especially in the urinary tract. It is used in treatment of cystitis, prostatitis, and urethritis, and also to relieve pain of enlarged prostate and kidney stones.

Precautions

Dog grass is toxic to birds. It may also lower blood sugars in people. The August 2005 edition of the Journal of Ethnopharmacology published a study noting a potent blood sugar lowering effect of this herb in rats. Dog grass does not stimulate the release of insulin, but it appears to make cells much more sensitive to insulin, at least in the laboratory. Make sure you monitor your blood sugars if you are diabetic and take this herb. Prolonged use may cause low potassium levels in the body. Preliminary toxicological data is limited, so it may not be safe to consume if pregnant or breastfeeding.

Botanical: *Agropyrum repens* (BEAUV.)

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---**Synonyms**---Twitch-grass. Scotch Quelch. Quick-grass. Dog-grass. *Triticum repens* (Linn.).

---**Part Used**---Rhizome.

---**Habitat**---Couch-grass is widely diffused, being not only abundant in fields and waste places in Britain and on the Continent of Europe, but also in Northern Asia, Australia and North and South America. It was formerly known as *Triticum repens*, though now assigned to the genus *Agropyrum*.

Among these the Couch-grass (*Agropyrum repens*) is pre-eminent, though anything but a favourite with the farmer, for it has a slender, creeping rhizome, or underground stem, which extends for a considerable distance just beneath the surface of the ground, giving off lateral branches occasionally, and marked at intervals of about an inch by nodes, from which leaf-buds and slender branching roots are produced. These long, creeping, subterranean stems increase with great rapidity, and the smallest piece left in the ground will vegetate and quickly extend itself, so that it is almost impossible to extirpate it when once established in the soil, while its exhaustive powers render it very injurious to the crops. Its very name, *Couch*, is supposed to be derived from the Anglo-Saxon, *civice* (vivacious), on account of its tenacity of life. It is said that the only way to extirpate it, is to lay the ground down in pasture for some years, when the Couch will soon be destroyed by the close-growing Grasses, for it flourishes only in loose soil.

The name *Agropyron* is from the Greek *agros* (field), and *puros* (wheat).

On sandy seashores, the grass is often very abundant and assists in binding the sand and preventing the dunes from shifting, its long rhizome answering the purpose nearly as well as those of the Mat and Lyme Grasses.

Though commonly regarded in this country as a worthless and troublesome weed, its roots are, however,

considered on the Continent to be wholesome food for cattle and horses. In Italy, especially, they are carefully gathered by the peasants and sold in the markets. The roots have a sweet taste, somewhat resembling liquorice, and Withering relates that, dried and ground into meal, bread has been made with them in time of scarcity.

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---**Description**---From its long creeping, pointed root-stock, it produces in July several round, hollow flower stems, 2 to 3 feet high, thickened at the joints, bearing five to seven leaves and terminated by long, densely flowered, two-rowed spikes of flowers, somewhat resembling those of rye or beardless wheat, composed of eight or more oval spikelets on alternate sides of the spike, each containing four to eight florets, the awns, when present, being not more than half the length of the flower. The leaves are flat, with a long, cleft sheath, and are rough on the upper surface, having a row of hairs on each principal vein.

One of the names of this grass is Dog'sgrass, from its efficacy in relieving dogs when ill. They are often to be seen searching for its rough leaves, which they chew in order to procure vomiting. Culpepper closes his description of the grass by saying: 'If you know it not by this description, watch the dogs when they are sick and they will quickly lead you to it,' and concludes his account of its medicinal virtues with: 'and although a gardener be of another opinion, yet a physician holds half an acre of them to be worth five acres of carrots twice told over.'

Gerard wrote:

'Although that Couch-grasse be an unwelcome guest to fields and gardens, yet his physicke virtues do recompense those hurts; for it openeth the stoppings of the liver and reins without any manifest heat.' He says concerning a variety of Couch-grass that -

'the roots of this grass are knotty and tuberous in early spring, but in summer-time these bulbs lose all shape or form. . . . The learned Societie of London and the Physitions of the Colledge do hold this bulbous Couch grass in temperature agreeing with the common Couch Grass, but in vertues more effectual,' and mentions it as 'growing in the fields next to St. James' Wall, as ye go to Chelsea, and in the fields as ye go from the Tower Hill of London to Radcliffe.'

Culpepper greatly praises its virtues for diseases of the kidneys.

The juice of the roots drank freely is recommended by Boerhaave in obstruction of the viscera, particularly in cases of scirrhus liver and jaundice, and it is noteworthy that cattle having scirrhus livers in winter soon get cured when turned out to grass in spring. Sheep and goats eat the leaves as well as cows, horses eat them when young, but leave them untouched when fully grown.

The ancients were familiar with a grass under the names of *Agrostis* and *Gramen* - having a creeping root-stock like the Couchgrass. Dioscorides asserts that its root, taken in the form of decoction is a useful remedy in suppression of urine and stone in the bladder. The same statements are made by Pliny, and are found in the writings of Oribasius and Marcellus Empiricus in the fourth century and of Ætius in the sixth century, and figures of the plant may be found in Dodoens's herbal. The drug is also met with in the German pharmaceutical tariffs of the sixteenth century.

Formerly the decoction of Couch-grass roots was a popular drink taken to purify the blood in spring. The drug is still a domestic remedy in great repute in France, being taken as a demulcent and sudorific in the form of a *tisane*. Readers of *Trilby* will remember Little Billee being dosed with this, as most Parisians have been. The French also use the Cocksfoot-grass (*Cynodon Dactylon*), which they term

Pied-de-poule, in a similar way and for a similar purpose.

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---**Part Used**---The rhizome, or underground stem, collected in the spring and freed from leaves and roots.

Couch-grass rhizome is long, stiff, pale yellow and smooth, about 1/10 inch in diameter, hollow except at the nodes and strongly furrowed longitudinally, with five or six longitudinal ridges. Where the nodes occur, traces of rootlets may be found on the under surfaces and the fibrous remains of sheathing leaf-bases on the upper surfaces, but all traces of rootlets and leaves must be removed before use.

As found in commerce, the rhizome is always free from rootlets, cut into short lengths of 1/8 to 1/4 inch and dried, being thus in the form of little shining, straw-coloured, many-edged tubular pieces, which are without odour, but have a sweet taste.

---**Constituents**---Couch-grass rhizome contains about 7 to 8 per cent of Triticin (a carbohydrate resembling Inulin) and yielding levulose on hydrolysis. It appears to occur in the rhizome of other grasses, and possibly is widely diffused in the vegetable kingdom. Sugar, Inosite, Mucilage and acid malates are also constituents of the drug. Lactic acid and mannite may occur in an extract of the rhizome, but are understood to be fermentation products. Starch is not present and no definite active constituent has yet been discovered. The rhizome leaves about 4 1/2 per cent ash on incineration.

---**Medicinal Action and Uses**---Diuretic demulcent. Much used in cystitis and the treatment of catarrhal diseases of the bladder. It palliates irritation of the urinary passages and gives relief in cases of gravel.

It is also recommended in gout and rheumatism. It is supposed to owe its diuretic effect to its sugar, and is best given in the form of an infusion, made from 1 OZ. to a pint of boiling water, which may be freely used taken in wineglassful doses. A decoction is also made by putting 2 to 4 oz. in a quart of water and reducing down to a pint by boiling. Of the liquid extract 1/2 to 2 teaspoonsful are given in water.

Couch-grass is official in the Indian and Colonial Addendum of the British Pharmacopoeia for use in the Australasian, Eastern and North American Colonies, where it is much employed.

---**Substitutes**---*Agropyrum acutum* (R. et S.) *A. pungens* (R. et S.) and *A. junceum* (Beauv.), by some botanists regarded as mere maritime varieties of *A. repens*, have root-stocks similar to the latter.

COUCH-GRASS, DOG'S TOOTH

Botanical: *Cynodon dactylon* (PERS.)

---**Synonyms**---(*French*) Chien-dent. Pied-de-poule.

---**Part Used**---Rhizome.

Cynodon dactylon (Pers.), a grass very common in the south of Europe and the warmer parts of Western Europe, also indigenous to Northern Africa as far as Abyssinia, affords the *Gros Chien-dent* or *Chiendent* and *Pied-de-poule* of the French. It is a rhizome differing from that of Couch-grass, in being a little stouter and in containing much starch, of which there is no trace in Couch-grass. Under the microscope it displays an entirely different structure, inasmuch as it contains a large number of much

stronger fibrovascular bundles and a cellular tissue loaded with starch, and is, therefore, in appearance much more woody. It thus approximates to the rhizome of *Carex arenaria* (Linn.) which is as much used in Germany as that of *Cynodon* in France and Southern Europe. The latter appears to contain Asparagin, or a substance similar in composition to it.

The herb of *Hygrophila spinosa* (Linn.) has been used for the same purpose as Couchgrass rhizome, and was formerly included in the Indian and Colonial Addendum to the British Pharmacopoeia. It contains much mucilage.