

# Heather Flowers Profile

## Also known as

Calluna vulgaris and Erica vulgaris

## Introduction

Heather flowers are a traditional remedy in Swedish herbal medicine. A low mound of handsome greenery topped by multiple spikes of colored flowers, heathers are native to Ireland, Scandinavia, Russia, and northern North America, but are especially synonymous with Scotland and its history and lore. The native Picts were renowned for their fierceness in battle and their heather ale, which was made without the addition of malt and hops (as they don't grow in Scotland), instead relying on the heather's nectar for flavor and to help with the fermentation. In Scotland, white heather is considered good luck, no doubt due in part to its scarcity, much in the same way that a 4-leaf clover is in Celtic mythology. One legend says that white heather only grows on the burial grounds of the fairy folk. Heather flowers are also used in Moorland tea, used to treat coughs and calm nerves, and a favorite of renowned Scottish poet Robert Graves. Branches are used as broom straw, the leaves flavor beer and tea, the bark can be used for tanning, and the flowers yield nectar for honeybees. Another interesting fact is that Heather flowers are a traditional beer making ingredient and it is popularly used in parts of Europe and especially Ireland.

## Constituents

Dihydroxychromone, various forms of quercetin.

## Parts Used

Dried flowers and leaf.

## Typical Preparations

Teas, tinctures, infusions, can be used in capsule form. Also found in beverages, mostly in beer.

## Summary

Pharmacologists at the University of Uppsala in Sweden have found that heather flowers contain chemicals that stop the production of inflammatory hormones (prostaglandins) and block the action of platelet activating factor (PAF) in allergy. This property explains the herb's use in a variety of herbal formula, as noted in The Complete German Commission E Monographs, for "diseases and ailments of the kidneys and the lower urinary tract, enlargement of the prostate, as a diuretic, for prophylaxis of stone ailments, vaginal discharge, diseases and ailments of the gastrointestinal tract, diarrhea, spasms of the stomach and intestines, colic, diseases of the liver and gallbladder, for gout, arthritis, diseases and disorders of the respiratory tract, cough, colds, sleep disorders, restlessness, as eye baths for inflamed

eyes, treatment of wounds, for fever, spleen, and as a diaphoretic."

## **Precautions**

None.