

Lady's Mantle Herb Profile

Also known as

Alchemilla vulgaris and Alchemilla xanthochlora, Dewcup, Hairy Mantle, Lion's foot, Bear's foot, and Nine Hooks.

Introduction

Lady's mantle is a perennial herb found in North America, Europe, and Asia. It has been referenced in many medicinal and magical circles since the middle ages. Its first appearance in a botanical tome was in Jerome Bock's "History of Plants" in 1532. Its scientific name Alchemilla is a derivative of the Arab work Alkemelych, or alchemy, so called for the plant's magical healing potency. Folklore concerning Lady's Mantle seems to focus on the dew that is gathered on the leaves at the center of its furrowed leaves, which is said to be a key ingredient in several alchemical formulas. The dew was also said to be collected and used as a beauty lotion. Lady's Mantle was first associated with the worship of the Earth Mother, but as Christianity spread, and like many pagan symbols before it, it was absorbed and eventually became associated with the Virgin Mary. Although its leaves bear a striking resemblance to cilantro, lady's mantle is in the rose family.

Constituents

Tannins and flavonoids, chiefly quercetin.

Parts Used

The above-ground parts of the plant, dried.

Typical Preparations

Teas, extracts and seldom found encapsulated.

Summary

The most common use of lady's mantle in ancient times was to treat sudden infections of the mouth and throat. Cuts, scrapes, and burns were bathed in warm teas of lady's mantle to prevent infection. Lady's mantle tea has also been used to treat heavy menstruation, menstrual cramps, and disagreeable symptoms of menopause. Some modern herbalists recommend lady's mantle as a treatment for diabetes; it may help prevent circulatory problems in diabetics. It has also been used as a green dye for wool for centuries.

Precautions

None.

Botanical: Alchemilla vulgaris (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Rosaceae

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---Synonyms---Lion's Foot. Bear's Foot. Nine Hooks. Leontopodium. Stellaria

(*French*) Pied-de-lion.

(*German*) Frauenmantle.

---Parts Used---Herb, root.

---Habitat---The Lady's Mantle and the Parsley Piert, two small, inconspicuous plants, have considerable reputation as herbal remedies. They both belong to the genus *Alchemilla* of the great order Rosaceae, most of the members of which are natives of the American Andes, only a few being found in Europe, North America and Northern and Western Asia. In Britain, we have only three species, *Alchemilla vulgaris*, the Common Lady's Mantle, *A. arvensis*, the Field Lady's Mantle or Parsley Piert, and *A. alpina*, less frequent and only found in mountainous districts.

The Common Lady's Mantle is generally distributed over Britain, but more especially in the colder districts and on high-lying ground, being found up to an altitude of 3,600 feet in the Scotch Highlands. It is not uncommon in moist, hilly pastures and by streams, except in the south-east of England, and is abundant in Yorkshire, especially in the Dales. It is indeed essentially a plant of the north, freely found beyond the Arctic circle in Europe, Asia and also in Greenland and Labrador, and only on high mountain ranges, such as the Himalayas, if found in southern latitudes.

The plant is of graceful growth and though only a foot high and green throughout- flowers, stem and leaves alike, and therefore inconspicuous - the rich form of its foliage and the beautiful shape of its clustering blossoms make it worthy of notice.

---Description---The rootstock is perennialblack, stout and short - and from it rises the slender erect stem. The whole plant is clothed with soft hairs. The lower, radical leaves, large and handsome, 6 to 8 inches in diameter, are borne on slender stalks, 6 to 18 inches long and are somewhat kidneyshaped in general outline, with their margins cut into seven or mostly nine broad, but shallow lobes, finely toothed at the edges, from which it has obtained one of its local names: 'Nine Hooks.' The upper leaves are similar and either stalkless, or on quite short footstalks and are all actually notched and toothed. A noticeable feature is the leaflike stipules, also toothed, which embrace the stem.

The flowers, which are in bloom from June to August, are numerous and small, only about 1/8 inch in diameter, yellow-green in colour, in loose, divided clusters at the end of the freely-branching flower-stems, each on a short stalk, or pedicle. There are no petals, the calyx is four-cleft, with four conspicuous little bracteoles that have the appearance of outer and alternate segments of the calyx. There are four stamens, inserted on the mouth of the calyx, their filaments jointed.

The rootstock is astringent and edible and the leaves are eaten by sheep and cattle.

The common name, Lady's Mantle (in its German form, *Frauenmantle*), was first bestowed on it by the

sixteenth-century botanist, Jerome Bock, always known by the Latinized version of his name: Tragus. It appears under this name in his famous *History of Plants*, published in 1532, and Linnaeus adopted it. In the Middle Ages, this plant had been associated, like so many flowers, with the Virgin Mary (hence it is Lady's Mantle, not Ladies' Mantle), the lobes of the leaves being supposed to resemble the scalloped edges of a mantle. In mediaeval Latin we also find it called *Leontopodium* (lion's foot), probably from its spreading root-leaves, and this has become in modern French, *Pied-de-lion*. We occasionally find the same idea expressed in two English local names, 'Lion's foot' and 'Bear's foot.' It has also been called 'Stellaria,' from the radiating character of its lower leaves, but this belongs more properly to quite another group of plants, with star-like blossoms of pure white.

A yellow fungus sometimes attacks the plant known as *Uromyces alchemillae*, and has the curious effect of causing abnormal length of the leaf-stalk and rendering the blade of the leaf smaller and of a paler green colour; this fungus produces the same effect in other plants.

The generic name *Alchemilla* is derived from the Arabic word, *Alkemelych* (alchemy), and was bestowed on it, according to some old writers, because of the wonder-working powers of the plant. Others held that the alchemical virtues lay in the subtle influence the foliage imparted to the dewdrops that lay in its furrowed leaves and in the little cup formed by its joined stipules, these dewdrops constituting part of many mystic potions.

---Part Used Medicinally---The whole herb, gathered in June and July when in flower and when the leaves are at their best, and dried.

The root is sometimes also employed, generally fresh.

---Medicinal Action and Uses---The Lady's Mantle has astringent and styptic properties, on account of the tannin it contains. It is 'of a very drying and binding character' as the old herbalists expressed it, and was formerly considered one of the best vulneraries or wound herbs.

Culpepper says of it:

'Lady's Mantle is very proper for inflamed wounds and to stay bleeding, vomitings, fluxes of all sorts, bruises by falls and ruptures. It is one of the most singular wound herbs and therefore highly prized and praised, used in all wounds inward and outward, to drink a decoction thereof and wash the wounds therewith, or dip tents therein and put them into the wounds which wonderfully drieth up all humidity of the sores and abateth all inflammations thereof. It quickly healeth green wounds, not suffering any corruption to remain behind and cureth old sores, though fistulous and hollow.'

In modern herbal treatment, it is employed as a cure for excessive menstruation and is taken internally as an infusion (1 OZ. of the dried herb to 1 pint of boiling water) in teacupful doses as required and the same infusion is also employed as an injections.

A strong decoction of the fresh root, by some considered the most valuable part of the plant, has also been recommended as excellent to stop all bleedings, and the root dried and reduced to powder is considered to answer the same purpose and to be good for violent purgings.

In Sweden, a tincture of the leaves has been given in cases of spasmodic or convulsive diseases, and an old authority states that if placed under the pillow at night, the herb will promote quiet sleep.

Fluid extract, dose, 1/2 to 1 drachm.

Horses and sheep like the plant, and it has therefore been suggested as a profitable fodder plant, but the

idea has proved unpractical. Grazing animals will not eat the leaves till the moisture in them is dissipated.

---Other Species---

Alchemilla alpine, a mountain variety, found on the banks of Scotch rivulets. The leaves are deeply divided into five oblong leaflets and are thickly covered with lustrous silky hairs. A form of this plant in which the leaflets are connate for one-third of their length is known as *A. conjuncta*.