

Lungwort Herb Profile

Also known as

Pulmonaria officinalis, Spotted Lungwort, Jerusalem Cowslip, Oak Lungs, Lung Moss, Spotted Comfrey, Spotted Dog, Lugenkraut, and Sage of Bethlem

Introduction

Lungwort is one of the first plants to flower in the early spring in its native habitats. The leaves have been used in traditional medicine to treat lung diseases with which it may have been associated because of the shape of the leaves and their grey spots, which resembled a diseased lung. Lungwort, in combination with wormwood, was one of the remedies that was tried during the bubonic plague in the 14th century. Noted herbalist Nicholas Culpeper wrote that it was useful in treating a variety of diseases of the lungs. Lungwort leaves can be eaten as a vegetable, either raw in salads, or cooked, but it is most often used in medicine for its expectorant and demulcent properties. Sometimes referred to as the "Herb of Mary", it was used as part of a formula to help reveal if someone was a witch or not, and also conversely it was worn as a protection against the evil eye. Lungwort grows wild throughout the Eastern United States and in its native Western Europe. It is distinguished by its spotted leaves and bright flowers that change color from rose to blue, with both colors often being found on the plant at the same time.

Constituents

Catecholtannins, Silicic Acid, Allantoin, Saponins, Flavonoids, Quercetin, Kaempferol, Tannic Acid

Parts Used

Leaves

Typical Preparations

Dried and as a tincture, tea or in capsules.

Summary

In the middle ages, lungwort was sometimes thought to be dangerous because the spots on the leaves looked like a diseased lung; today we know that lungwort has a high mucilage content, making it quite useful in treating chest and throat complaints. It has been used to treat coughs, including whooping cough, asthma and coughs arising from tuberculosis. It combines well with other herbs and plants like coltsfoot in cold and cough remedies. Its astringent and diuretic properties may make it useful in external applications on wounds and skin problems.

Precautions

Lungwort contains toxic pyrrolizidin alkaloids, so it must be administered by someone qualified in the appropriate use of this material. Its long term use is not recommended and it is not to be used while pregnant.

Botanical: *Sticta pulmonaria* (LINT.)

Family: N.O. Lichenes

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---Synonyms---Jerusalem Cowslip. Oak Lungs. Lung Moss.

---Part Used---Herb.

Lungwort, a member of the Borage tribe, is found in woods and thickets, but is not common, and is by some only regarded as an escape from gardens, where it is cultivated now mostly for the sake of its ornamental leaves, which are curiously spotted with white.

---Description---The stem grows about a foot high, bearing rough, alternate, egg-shaped leaves, the lower ones stalked, and the flowers in a terminal inflorescence, red before expanding and pale purple when fully open.

The leaves of this plant, which are the part that has been used in medicine, have no peculiar smell, but when fresh have a slight astringent and mucilaginous taste, hence they have been supposed to be demulcent and pectoral, and have been used in coughs and lung catarrhs in the form of an infusion.

Its popular and Latin names seem to have been derived from the speckled appearance of the leaves resembling that of the lungs, and their use in former days was partly founded on the doctrine of signatures.

The Lungwort sold by druggists to-day is not this species, but a Moss, known also as Oak Lungs and Lung Moss.

The Lungwort formerly held a place in almost every garden, under the name of 'Jerusalem Cowslip'; and it was held in great esteem for its reputed medicinal qualities in diseases of the lungs.

Sir J. E. Smith says that:

'every part of the plant is mucilaginous, but its reputation for coughs arose not from this circumstance, but from the speckled appearance of the leaves, resembling the lungs!'

---Medicinal Action and Uses---An infusion of 1 teaspoonful of the dried herb to a cup of boiling water is taken several times a day for subduing inflammation, and for its healing effect in pulmonary complaints.

Fluid extract, 1/2 to 1 drachm.