

Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*, *Leonurus heterophyllus*)

Common Name: Leonurus.

Location: This herb is native to Central Asia, and is now naturalized in North Africa and Europe.

Motherwort is also cultivated as a garden plant.

Description: The plant bears toothed, palm-shaped leaves and pink flowers. The above ground parts are used in herbal medicine.

Properties: Motherwort balances hormones. It affects the menstrual cycle in women and the heart in people of both sexes. Motherwort is a beneficial treatment for heart disorders caused by anxiety and stress and is useful for the treatment of hyperthyroidism.

Uses: The *L. cardiaca* species of motherwort is used primarily to treat heart conditions. It has traditionally been used to treat heart palpitations as well as depression. This herb has also been used to help stimulate the uterus.

Doses: Motherwort is available in fluid extracts and teas.

Warnings: Solid capsule or tablet form of the herb should be used with caution, if at all; a dose of 3000 milligrams of solid extracts taken per day in capsule or tablet form is likely to cause diarrhea, stomach irritation, or uterine bleeding. Because of the herb's traditional use for uterine stimulation, motherwort should not be used by pregnant women. If you suffer from a heart disorder or take any medicine for a heart condition, consult with your health care provider before taking this herb.

Motherwort Herb Profile

Also known as

Leonurus cardiaca, lion's ear, lion's tale, throwwort.

Introduction

Motherwort is a mint with dull green, hairy leaves and an intensely bitter taste. The botanical name *Leonurus* refers to a fanciful resemblance of the leaves to a lion's tale. Native to Central Asia, the German E Commission has stated that it may be useful for nervous cardiac disorder and as an adjuvant for thyroid hyperfunction. Many noted herbalists have gone on record that motherwort is also something mood elevator. Nicholas Culpepper wrote that motherwort will make "the mind cheerful, blithe, and merry". Maude Grieve wrote that there is "no better herb for strengthening and gladdening the heart". Many folk remedies revolve around motherwort as well. Several involve it being a useful herb for the transition period of a woman's life, in fact the Chinese name for it, *yi mu cao*, translates as "benefit mother herb". One rather odd Hindu tale relates that if you make a tea of motherwort and add it to the laundry when you wash your socks and underwear, you will bring peace to your home.

Constituents

Motherwort contains four groups of medicinally active chemicals:

- Caffeic acid 4-rutinoside.

- Diterpenes of the labdane type, such as leocardin, a mixture of two epimers of 8b-acetoyx-9a, 13a, 15, 16-bisepoxy-15-hydroxy-7-oxo- labdan-6b, 19-olide.
- Flavonoids; rutin, quinqueloside, genkwanin, quercitin, quercetrin, isoquercetrin, hyperoside, and apigenin and kaempferol glucosides.
- Iridoids: leonuride and others not yet identified.

Parts Used

All the above-ground parts of the plant, gathered after flowering, dried, and cut.

Typical Preparations

Traditionally used as a tea. Frequently combined with hawthorn. May also be taken as an extract or capsule.

Summary

The traditional use of motherwort is the treatment of racing heart (tachycardia) caused by nervous tension. Long-term use may reduce the formation of clotting factors and also lower total cholesterol and triglycerides. Motherwort is also used to treat menstrual tension. It treats false labor pains, and it is useful in the stimulation of delayed or suppressed menstruation, especially when prolonged emotional stress is factor.

Precautions

Consult your physician before using this herb if you take prescription medication for your heart. Not recommended while pregnant.

Botanical: *Leonurus cardiaca* (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Labiatae

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---Part Used---Herb.

Motherwort, the only British representative of the genus *Leonurus*, is a native of many parts of Europe, on banks and under hedges, in a gravelly or calcareous soil. It is often found in country gardens, where it was formerly grown for medicinal purposes, but it is rare to find it truly wild in England, and by some authorities it is not considered indigenous, but merely a garden escape.

---Description---It is distinguished from all other British labiates by the leaves, which are deeply and palmately cut into five lobes, or three-pointed segments, and by the prickly calyx-teeth of its flowers. When not in flower, it resembles Mugwort in habit.

From the perennial root-stock rise the square, stout stems, 2 to 3 feet high, erect and branched, principally below, the angles prominent. The leaves are very closely set, the radical ones on slender, long petioles, ovate, lobed and toothed, those on the stem, 2 to 3 inches long, petioled, wedge-shaped; the lower roundish, palmately five-lobed, the lobes trifid at the apex, the upper three-fid, coarsely serrate, reticulately veined, the veinlets prominent beneath, with slender, curved hairs. The uppermost leaves and bracts are very narrow and entire, or only with a tooth on each side, and bear in their axils numerous whorls of pinkish, or nearly white, sessile flowers, six to fifteen in a whorl. The corollas, though whitish on the outside, are stained with paler or darker purple within. They have rather short tubes and nearly flat upper lips, very hairy above, with long, woolly hairs. The two front stamens are the longest and the anthers are sprinkled with hard, shining dots.

The plant blossoms in August. It has rather a pungent odour and a very bitter taste. It is a dull green, the leaves paler below, pubescent, especially on the angles of the stem and the underside of the leaves, the hairs varying much in length and abundance.

The name of the genus, *Leonurus*, in Greek signifies a Lion's tail, from some fancied resemblance in the plant.

---Cultivation---When once planted in a garden, Motherwort will soon increase if theseeds are permitted to scatter. It is perfectly hardy and needs no special soil, and the roots will continue for many years.

Seedlings should be planted about a foot apart.

---Part Used---The whole herb, dried, cut in August. The drying may be carried out in any of the ways described for Scullcap.

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---Medicinal Action and Uses---Diaphoretic, antispasmodic, tonic, nervine, emmenagogue.

Motherwort is especially valuable in female weakness and disorders (hence the name), allaying nervous irritability and inducing quiet and passivity of the whole nervous system.

As a tonic, it acts without producing febrile excitement, and in fevers, attended with nervousness and delirium, it is extremely useful.

Old writers tell us that there is no better herb for strengthening and gladdening the heart, and that it is good against hysterical complaints, and especially for palpitations of the heart when they arise from hysteric causes, and that when made into a syrup, it will allay inward tremors, faintings, etc. There is no doubt it has proved the truth of their claims in its use as a simple tonic, not only in heart disease, neuralgia and other affections of the heart, but also in spinal disease and in recovery from fevers where other tonics are inadmissable.

In Macer's *Herbal* we find 'Motherwort' mentioned as one of the herbs which were considered all-powerful against 'wykked sperytis.'

The best way of giving it is in the form of a conserve, made from the young tops, says one writer. It may be given in decoctions, or a strong infusion, but is very unpleasant to take that way. The infusion is made from 1 OZ. of herb to a pint of boiling water, taken in wineglassful doses.

---Preparations and Dosages--- Powdered herb, 1/2 to 1 drachm. Fluid extract, 1/2 to 1 drachm. Solid extract, 5 to 15 grains.

Culpepper wrote of Motherwort:

'Venus owns this herb and it is under Leo. There is no better herb to drive melancholy vapours from the heart, to strengthen it and make the mind cheerful, blithe and merry. May be kept in a syrup, or conserve, therefore the Latins call it cardiaca.... It cleanseth the chest of cold phlegm, oppressing it and killeth worms in the belly. It is of good use to warm and dry up the cold humours, to digest and disperse them that are settled in the veins, joints and sinews of the body and to help cramps and convulsions.'

And Gerard says:

'Divers commend it against infirmities of the heart. Moreover the same is commended for green wounds; it is also a remedy against certain diseases in cattell, as the cough and murreine, and for that cause divers husbandmen oftentimes much desire it.'