

Good herbs to know

Growth habits, morphology, uses in herbalism

Burdock, Comfrey



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Recognition and identification of plants

1. Learn it in every season
2. Learn its typical habits
3. Learn to use plant ID and plant key books
4. Practice

1. Seasons and identification



Spring, seedling, 3"



Late spring 1 ft tall



Summer, 3 ft tall

Seasons and identification



Late summer, bolting



In full flower



Gone to seed "burr"

Burdock is a biennial

Definition - taking 2 years to complete its life cycle

- It only grows the basal rosette the first year
- It grows the flower stalk and flowers in its second year.

- Eat the root of first year plants.
- Eat the stems of 2nd year plants.

- How will you know? Observe other burdocks around you.

Burdock root

Use the root of the first-year plant.

Use the stem of the second-year plant.

Harvest the root in late fall of the burdock's first year, or in early spring of its second year.

Cut the root either the long way or across to make smaller pieces

This root is succulent – it has a lot of moisture. So dry it using a relatively high heat of 150 degrees.

Burdock root

- This is not an herb I use a lot.
- It does not have well-documented treatment effects according to WebMD
- <https://www.webmd.com/vitamins/ai/ingredientmono-111/burdock>

Burdock uses

- It is best known to me as a liver cleanser and tonic to correct skin conditions.
- It is a diuretic – it removes water from the body as urine.
- It is used as a tonic – we'll discuss the definition of a tonic later.
- Because it has a deep tap root – it is a bio-accumulator like comfrey.
- It may have benefits of adding calcium to the diet when used as a tonic.

Burdock root preparation

- Burdock root can be prepared in a wide variety of ways including:
- Tincture (also the seed and fresh root)
- Glycerite
- Decoction
- Extraction
- Infusion
- Salve
- Percolation
- See page 373 “Burdock” to look up all the ways to prepare it.

Spring is the hardest season to know plants

- The identifying characteristics are small or missing.
- You can use habitats to help you identify spring plants that do not have other identifiers.
- Remember the plants that reoccur in the same place year after year

Spring is the hardest – remember from last year

- I know comfrey regrows in the same place in our pasture every single year and identify it by leaf alone rather than waiting for it to flower.



Comfrey: *Symphytum officinale*

- Used in healing of swelling, bruises, sprains and bones.
(knitbone, boneset) (Greek *symphis*, means knitting of bones)
- Best if leaves are harvested before the plant flowers.
- Active ingredient is Allantoin which aids in cellular “granulation”
- But in modern times, best to get a broken bone set by a doctor rather than relying on an herb. 😊

Comfrey: “*mode of action*” (from Green pg 280)

- “...our most valuable ally for repairing wounds, while at the same time it soothes and softens tissue.
- It is probably the most healing mucilaginous remedy ...
- used for centuries to treat external ulcerations and all types of lesions and injuries ranging from small cuts and abrasions to large wounds and broken bones.
- A comfrey poultice quickens the repair of the normally slow healing process of torn cartilage, tendons, and ligaments”

Comfrey: “*mode of action*” (from Green pg 280)

- “Its mucilage (slimy) and tannins (tightening) produce an astringent and contracting effect
- By drawing a wound together at the surface, it reduces the need for stitching:
- Its generous allantoin content stimulates the regeneration of skin tissue making the formation of scar tissue less likely”

Comfrey: *Symphytum officinale*

- Debate on taking comfrey as a tea or tincture internally.
- Some science shows that some cultivars are very high in alkaloids.
- Alkaloids are often liver toxins, (poisons) in high doses.
- The toxic cultivar is one that originates in Russia.
- I don't know the origin of the cultivar in our pastures.
- The cattle eat it with no apparent issues.
- It regrows well even after grazing three or four times each summer



Comfrey Root



Botanical Name: *Symphytum officinale*

Origin: Bulgaria

Choose Size *

4 oz. 1 lb.

\$4.25

- 1 +

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Comfrey:
*Symphytum
officinale*

*Not for use
during
pregnancy*

For thousands of years, comfrey root has been highly regarded in traditional European practices for its healthful properties in topical preparations. *Symphytum officinale* is native to Europe and temperate Asia but is now naturalized worldwide. The plant has large, hairy leaves, a scorpioid inflorescence of bell-shaped flowers, and black roots.

A member of the Borage or *Boraginaceae* family, comfrey's relatives include both borage (*Borago sp.*) and heliotrope (*Heliotropium sp.*). The *Symphytum* genus contains about 35 species, all of which can be used interchangeably, although pyrrolizidine alkaloid content varies between species and are highest in Russian comfrey (*S. x uplandicum*) and prickly comfrey or (*S. asperum*). Comfrey has large, rough, hairy, and lance-shaped leaves with whitish, pink, or purple flower spikes which have a slight heliotrope like curl typical of this family. It is native to much of Europe, and various regions in Asia such as the Caucasus, Kazakhstan, Siberia, and Turkey, and is commonly found as a weed in temperate northern latitudes.

Precautions

Not for internal use. Do not apply to broken or abraded skin. Do not use when nursing. We recommend that you consult with a qualified healthcare practitioner before using.

Comfrey: *preparations*

Internal:

- Decoction of dried root, 2-3 g in 1 c. water
- Infusion – comfrey leaf, 2-4 g in 1 c. hot water
- Oil infusion – leaf and root

• External:

- Salve, leaf and/or root
- Poultice, leaf and/or root, * this is the place I use it most

Comfrey: *poultice*

Easy

Ideally, leaves are harvest just before the plant flowers

Harvest a handful (6-8) of leaves

Chop them up or grind them in your food processor

Place in a moistened dish towel

Place on the injury or wound (not an open wound).

Hold in place for a half hour or so



Comfrey makes a great pollinator
plant also!

