

Comfrey

Symphytum officinale

Comfrey may be used externally to speed wound-healing and guard against scar tissue developing incorrectly. Because it heals so quickly, care should be taken with very deep wounds, to avoid abscesses. It is wise to mix comfrey with calendula when using it for wound healing properties as the calendula is an antiseptic and will keep out infection.

For gastric ulcers and inflammations it combines well with Marshmallow and Meadowsweet. For chest and bronchial troubles use it with Wild Cherry, Mullein or Elecampane.

Comfrey facts:

- blooms throughout the greater part of the summer, the first flowers opening at the end of April or early May

Comfrey description:

- leafy stem, 2 to 3 feet high, is stout, angular and hollow, broadly winged at the top and covered with bristly hairs
- lower, radical leaves are very large, up to 10 inches long, ovate in shape and covered with rough hairs which promote itching when touched
- stem-leaves are decurrent, i.e. a portion of them runs down the stem, the body of the leaf being continued beyond its base and point of attachment with the stem. They decrease in size the higher they grow up the stem, which is much branched above and terminated by one-sided clusters of drooping flowers, either creamy yellow, or purple, growing on short stalks.
- racemes of flowers are given off in pairs, and are what is known as scorpioid in form, the curve they always assume suggesting, as the word implies, the curve of a scorpion's tail, the flowers being all placed on one side of the stem, gradually tapering from the fully-expanded blossom to the final and almost imperceptible bud at the extremity of the curve, as in the Forget-meNot
- the corollas are bell-shaped, the calyx deeply five-cleft, narrow to lance-shaped, spreading, more downy in the purple flowered type
- fruits consist of four shining nutlets, perforated at the base, and adhering to the receptacle by their base.



Comfrey nutritional information:

- Calcium
- Potassium
- Phosphorus
- Protein
- Vitamins A, B12, C

Comfrey constituents:

- Mucilage, about 29%, composed of a polysaccharide containing glucose & fructose
- Tannins
- Allantoin
- Pyrrolizidine alkaloids, including echimidine, symphytine, lycopsamine, symplandine. The alkaloids are found in the fresh young leaves and in the root, but in two separate investigations were found to be absent in the dried herb.
- Phenolic acids; rosmarinic, chlorogenic, caffeic and lithospermic acids

- trace amounts of starch
- Miscellaneous; choline, asparagine, volatile oil, tannins, steroidal saponins, triterpenes

Comfrey actions:

- Demulcent
- Mildly astringent
- Expectorant
- Emollient
- Vulnerary
- Anti-inflammatory

Comfrey Medicinal Indications:

- Well known for its wound healing abilities both internally and externally
- A powerful healing agent in gastric and duodenal ulcers, hiatus hernia and ulcerative colitis
- Helpful for hemorrhaging
- Has been used with benefit in cases of bronchitis and irritable cough, where it will soothe and reduce irritation whilst helping expectoration
- Also used for external ulcers, wounds and fractures, chronic varicose ulcers and has a reputed anti-cancer action
- Breaks down scar tissue and helps to dissolve and clear up scars

Comfrey Applications:

- Decoction of roots – mucilage benefits good for bronchitis and irritable cough. Gently boil 2 –3 teaspoons of powdered root per cup of water for 15 minutes. Cool. Drink up to 3 cups a day.
- Infusion of leaves – used to treat gastric and duodenal ulcers, hiatus hernia and ulcerative colitis; helps stop hemorrhaging. Use 1/2 ounce of dried leaves per cup of boiling water. Steep 10 minutes. Drink up to 3 cups a day.
- Salve – excellent on all skin problems (except poison ivy); use for dry, itchy skin, all wounds, cuts, etc. external ulcers. Comfrey root is excellent for fading and healing scars apply salve as needed
- Dried Herbs – Use in bathwater to assist with dry skin or other skin irritations. add a couple of handfuls of dried leaves and flowers to the bathwater
- Poultice – used to wounds, fractures, bruises, sprains, chronic varicose ulcers, hiatus hernia. Mash the leaves and add hot or cold water (depending on use) to make a paste. Apply to afflicted area, cover with cotton cheesecloth, wrap with a piece of wool and place hot water bottle or ice pack on top to regulate temperature. When it ceases to be the correct temperature, replace with fresh poultice. Repeat until symptoms have subsided.

Harvesting Comfrey:

- Leaves are harvested during or after flowering. Remove flowers and stems.
- Roots are harvested in Fall after flowering.

Preserving comfrey:

- Drying

Getting to Know comfrey:

Experiment 1 – know what it looks like

Study a live plant or pictures if the live version is not available. Notice how it grows out of the ground. Is it bushy? Does it sprawl? Where are the leaves located? What do the flowers look like? Sketch the plant on the last page of this handout.

Experiment 2 – taste the herb

Try both fresh and dried comfrey. What does it taste like in both instances?

Fresh leaf:

Dried leaf:

Experiment 3 – making an infusion and tea

4 tablespoons raw herb (leaves and stems, chopped) = 1 tablespoon dried.

To make a tea, use 1 tbsp dried herb per cup of water. Boil water, and remove from flame. Add herb and steep 10–20 minutes.

To make an infusion, add 1/2 cup dried herb to 1 quart jar. Add boiling water to fill and let steep for 6 – 8 hours. Strain and chill until needed. May be drank hot, cold or room temperature. Use within 48 hours of making. Note: Infusions are only made with dried plant material.

- Compare the difference between fresh and dried infusions
- Compare the difference between warm and chilled infusions

	Fresh leaf	Dried leaf
Tea		
Infusion	---	

Experiment 4 - making a salve

1 c. olive oil
 ¼ c. beeswax
 comfrey leaf and root
 1 vitamin E capsule

Bring one cup of cold-pressed extra-virgin olive oil to a low heat in a small stainless steel pot. Do NOT boil. Add as much comfrey (equal parts) as you can push below the surface. Let this steep for about an hour over a low, low fire to extract all the juice. Strain. Add beeswax for desired consistency (approx ¼ cup). Add contents of vitamin E capsule. Pour into jars.

Experiment 5- cooking with comfrey

Surgery Tea

From Earth Mother Herbal by Shatoiya De La Tour

This tea is recommended for anyone facing surgery. St. John's wort helps with the trauma of surgery, both physical and emotional and the comfrey aids the healing process.

1 p. Comfrey leaf
 1 p. St. John's wort
 ½ p. mint

Blend together. Use 1 teaspoon per cup of water. Steep 15 minutes. Drink 3 cups a day, 3 days before and after surgery.

Experiment 6 - Further study/references

The following are some internet sites that have great information on comfrey:

<http://www.healthy.net/scr/Article.asp?id=1648>
<http://animahealingarts.org/?p=426>
<http://botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/c/comfre92.html>
http://www.susunweed.com/herbal_ezine/June08/wisewoman.htm

- On your own, read at least three separate sources of information regarding comfrey. The following are some books that have information but do not limit your search to my selections.

Indian Herbology of North America by Almar Hutchins pgs. 92 – 94
 Earth Mother Herbal by Shatoiya De La Tour pgs 60 – 62
 A Modern Herbal by Mrs. M. Grieve pgs. 215 – 218
 The Holistic Herbal by David Hoffman p. 148
 The Complete Medicinal Herbal by Penelope Ody p. 101
 Rosemary Gladstar's Family Herbal by Rosemary Gladstar p. 325

- Plant some comfrey in your yard and observe its growing cycle.