

Description

Comfrey *Symphytum Officinale* Family: Boraginaceae

Comfrey has big, elongated, fleshy leaves which are covered in hairs and grow up to 25cm in length and 10cm in width with a pronounced mid rib and vein throughout.

At the end of a round hollow stem which grows up to 90cm in height, small bell-shaped white, pink, cream or purple flowers grow. The root is a black tap with white mucilaginous flesh inside.

Growing Tips

This perennial herb likes well-drained, rich, slightly acid soil with some sun and plenty of water. It is easily propagated by root division and can be invasive in the garden if left to grow freely. The leaves are harvested in early summer and the roots in late autumn.

Parts Used

Leaves and roots

Uses

The leaves and root can be dried or used fresh in ointments, poultices, tea or tinctures for wound healing and any mending of connective tissues, bones, skin lesions, swellings, bruising, arthritis and gangrene. The tea and tincture are also soothing and healing to the digestive tract.

To make a poultice, wash the leaves and roots then crush them and apply to the wound in a muslin cloth. Leave for a few hours and repeat daily.

Comfrey is very rich in nutrients including vitamin A, B12 and C, and calcium, potassium, copper, magnesium, iron, sulphur, zinc, as well as Lysine which is an important amino acid for getting rid of cold sores.

It is also useful for the garden as a fertilizer and can be added to the compost.

Origin & History

Comfrey originates in Europe and Western Asia and has been used medicinally since 400BC by the Greeks - the healer Dioscorides mentioned its use in mending broken bones.

This gave rise to its common name 'Boneset', or 'Knitbone'. Internally it was used to treat stomach disorders and to stop internal bleeding.

In the 1970s it came under some scrutiny when extensive use caused severe liver damage due to its high alkaloid content. Since then only external applications are available commercially.

