

BLOOMSBURY
Concise
Herb
Guide



B L O O M S B U R Y

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There are 47 individual Wildlife Trusts covering the whole of the UK and the Isle of Man and Alderney. Together, The Wildlife Trusts are the largest UK voluntary organization dedicated to protecting wildlife and wild places everywhere – at land and sea. They are supported by 800,000 members, 150,000 of whom belong to their junior branch, Wildlife Watch. Every year The Wildlife Trusts work with thousands of schools, and their nature reserves and visitor centres receive millions of visitors.

The Wildlife Trusts work in partnership with hundreds of landowners and businesses in the UK. Building on their existing network of 2,250 nature reserves, The Wildlife Trusts' recovery plan for the UK's wildlife and fragmented habitats, known as A Living Landscape, is being achieved through restoring, recreating and reconnecting large areas of wildlife habitat.

The Wildlife Trusts also have a vision for the UK's seas and sea life – Living Seas, in which wildlife thrives from the depths of the oceans to the coastal shallows. In Living Seas, wildlife and habitats are recovering, the natural environment is adapting well to a changing climate, and people are inspired by marine wildlife and value the sea for the many ways in which it supports our quality of life. As well as protecting wildlife, these projects help to safeguard the ecosystems we depend on for services like clean air and water. All 47 Wildlife Trusts are members of the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (Registered charity number 207238). To find your local Wildlife Trust visit wildlifetrusts.org

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Contents

Introduction	6	Willowherbs	76
		Witch-hazels	77
Junipers	10	Nutmegs	78
Willows	11	Ivies	79
Hop	12	Carrots	80
Wax-myrtles	13	Heathers	98
Nettles	14	Gentians	101
Sandalwoods	15	Olives	102
Knotweeds	16	Bogbeans	103
Goosefoots	17	Bedstraws	104
Amaranths	19	Borages	108
Pinks	21	Verbenas	111
Buttercups	23	Dead-nettles	113
Poppies	24	Nightshades	135
Cabbages	27	Sesames	140
Capers	37	Figworts	141
Laurels	38	Valerians	142
Star-anises	41	Broomrapes	143
Custard Apples	42	Plantains	144
Stonecrops	43	Peppers	146
Roses	44	Elderberries	147
Balsams	54	Daisies	148
Peas	55	Amaranths	174
Nasturtiums	60	Aloes	175
Geraniums	61	Onions	176
Spurges	62	Asparaguses	179
Rues	63	Irises	180
Torchwoods	64	True Grasses	181
Quassias	65	Duckweeds	183
Buckthorns	66	Gingers	184
Limes	67	Orchids	187
Mallows	68	Water-plantains	188
St John's-worts	70	Bulrushes	189
Violets	71		
Myrtles	73	Index	190

Introduction

This book pictures and describes 180 key commonly used herbs, indicating which parts are used and for what purpose. The information is concise and does not describe gardening or preparation methods, culinary techniques or doses in relation to the healing properties of herbs. Detailed information on all these aspects can be found elsewhere, although a qualified practitioner should always be consulted before using herbs medicinally.

What Are Herbs?

The word 'herb' can be used in several ways. Scientifically, it refers to plants that lack woody tissues, but as an everyday term it also refers to plants used for culinary or medicinal purposes.

Herbs are plants, or parts of plants such as roots, leaves, flowers or fruits, which are used to flavour foods and for their healing properties. Spices are generally regarded as the hard parts of aromatic plants, usually of tropical origin. They include roots, stems, bark, dry fruits and seeds, but some are actually soft parts like flower buds, as in the case of Cloves. The hard parts of many temperate plants also provide herbal products, and can be regarded as spices, Cumin seeds being an example. In the medicinal sense even less distinction is made between herbs and spices, and all medicinal plants tend to be referred to as herbs.

Uses of Herbs

Herbs originally began to be used for culinary purposes for practical reasons – to improve the keeping qualities of meat, and disguise the poor-quality and often rotten food that was all there was to be had. Today, many herbs are used to make food more palatable by adding flavour and easing digestion. They are often regarded as essential ingredients, and are commercially important as preservatives.

Medicinal herbs were once the only remedies available to people, and have long been the mainstay of domestic medicine. Some have been shown to be valueless or even dangerous, but others have proved effective; many have had a long and unbroken history of use.

Therapeutic herbs are used in aromatherapy and other holistic preparations. They are a source of the essential oils used in aromatherapy, as well as to scent pot-pourri mixtures and various cosmetic preparations. They are very concentrated and used in tiny amounts in massages, aromatic baths, inhalations and compresses.

In early herbalism there was no strict division into culinary and medicinal herbs. Many plants can be used for both purposes, and there were others – dye plants, cosmetics, colourants and strewing herbs – that also came within the domain of the herbalist and apothecary.

USING HERBS SAFELY

Herbal treatments are not without risk and should not be used with abandon, and the warnings attached to many of the species in this book should be heeded. Herbs may be harmful if taken in large doses, if toxic parts of a plant are used, if a plant is taken internally, if a person is suffering from a condition that may be adversely affected by using a specific herb, or if an individual is allergic to a particular herb. This book describes the parts of the herb that are usually used and their forms. It does not provide dosages, since these can vary depending on factors such as the condition being treated, and the age and health of an individual. Before attempting *any* treatment other than simple everyday remedies such as tonics, always consult a doctor or other qualified practitioner.

When gathering herbs in the wild, bear in mind that a required herb may have very similar relatives – perhaps harmful or even poisonous – with which it is easily confused. The carrot family, for example, contains many common herbs, but also extremely poisonous plants such as Hemlock. Unless you are very familiar with a herb, always thoroughly check its identity and seek expert advice.

8 Introduction

Gathering Herbs in the Wild

The garden is the best place to collect herbs, but if you do choose to look for herbs in the wild there are some fundamental rules that you should follow:

- Damage plants as little as possible, taking only the parts you need, and leaving plants to continue growing.
- Bear in mind that in Britain it is forbidden by law to uproot any plant without express permission of the landowner, and to collect any part, including seeds, of some rare species.
- Do not collect near main roads or in areas where pesticides or other chemicals may have been used.
- If there is any doubt whatsoever about the identity of a plant, leave it alone (see box, page 7).

Growing Herbs

Grown in a garden, herbs can look and smell wonderful, as well as being useful. You can plant them formally, laid out in well-defined patterns, or fit them into borders among other plants. Never spray or apply artificial chemicals to herbs.

Plants from Mediterranean regions, such as Lavender and Rosemary, generally thrive in a sunny position and light, well-drained soil. Woodland species do best in shade, and other herbs, such as Chervil and Valerian, grow happily in partial or dappled shade. In cooler northern areas, tender herbs can be grown in cold frames or moved to grow indoors in winter. Some plants described in this book, such as Cloves, Allspice and Frankincense, are tropical and cannot be grown outdoors in Britain, though smaller species may be grown in a heated conservatory or greenhouse.

Harvesting, Drying and Storing Herbs

If using fresh herbs, pick only the amount needed and use this immediately. Choose young and tender growth. In perennial species pinch off the tips of the main shoots to encourage bushy growth from side shoots. Otherwise pick off lower, older leaves first.

Harvest herbs for later use on a sunny day once the dew has dried out, but before the sun is strong enough to reduce a plant's oil

content. Gather only as much as can be used quickly. Aromatic plants are generally best harvested just before the flowers emerge, while herbs in which the leafy flowering tops are used are best just after the flowers have opened. Pick individual flowers when they are well open and before they begin to fade. Collect seeds as they ripen; it is often easiest to cut off the whole head and handle it by the stalk. Roots are generally best dug up in the autumn, when they are plump.

Dry herbs in a dark, warm and airy place, spreading them thinly on open racks or suspending them in bunches. Quick drying is essential to prevent loss of flavour and colour.

Herbs are ready to store when all parts are brittle and break with a snap. Leaves can then be stripped from the stems if required. Seeds are best shaken out of the dry heads. Store dried herbs in airtight containers such as glass jars, opaque boxes or tightly sealed plastic bags, and keep them in a dark place.

Explanations of Some Relevant Terms

ANTISEPTIC Countering infection by preventing the growth of bacteria.

AXIL Angle between leaf and stem.

CALYX Sepals of a flower.

CAPSULE Dry fruit splitting when ripe to release seeds.

DISC FLORET Very small tubular flower with equal lobes, typical of daisies.

DIURETIC Increasing urine production.

ESSENTIAL OIL Volatile oil produced by aromatic plants and providing their characteristic scent and flavour.

LANCEOLATE Shaped like the blade of a spear, widest below the middle.

MUCILAGE Substance that swells and becomes slimy in water.

OPPOSITE LEAVES Pair of leaves at each joint of the stem.

PALMATE LEAVES With lobes or leaflets spreading from a single point.

PERIANTH Sepals and petals of a flower.

PINNATE LEAVES With two parallel rows of lobes or leaflets.

SPUR Projection formed by a flower's sepals or petals.

STAMEN Flower's male organ.

TRIFOLIATE LEAVES With three leaflets.

UMBEL Branched inflorescence, with branches of equal length and all radiating from the same point, typical of the carrot family.

VERMIFUGE Substance used to drive out worms.

Juniper

Juniperus communis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Small tree or shrub to 6m tall. Prickly green foliage of female trees is studded with berry-like green cones that ripen to blue-black with a dull bloom in the second or third year.

DISTRIBUTION Native to most areas of the temperate northern hemisphere.

USES Berries are used to flavour marinades, gin, pickles, sauces and game-bird stuffings. They yield an antiseptic and diuretic oil used to treat cystitis. They should not be eaten during pregnancy, and the oil must only be taken internally under medical supervision.



White Willow

Salix alba

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Silvery-grey tree to 25m tall and with upswept branches. Leaves are narrow and silvery-hairy; they eventually become dull green above. Catkins appear with the leaves; males and females grow on separate trees.

DISTRIBUTION Found in most of Europe, and western and central Asia.

USES Fresh and dried bark has long been used for colds and aches, and as a general painkiller. Contains the basis of aspirin, although this is now produced synthetically.



Hop

Humulus lupulus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial climber with twining stems growing to 6m tall. Leaves are large, opposite, bristly and usually have 3–5 leaflets. Plants are unisexual, males with branched clusters of flowers, females with papery cones.

DISTRIBUTION Native to northern temperate regions, and often cultivated.

USES Best known for its use in flavouring beer, and grown on a large commercial scale for the brewing industry. Only the fruiting heads are used. Young shoots can be steamed and eaten like asparagus. Hops are said to counter liver and digestive disorders, and used to make a mild sedative.

Bog-myrtle

Myrica gale



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Deciduous shrub to 1m tall. Leaves are oval and toothed at the tips. Red female and orange male catkins, borne at the tips of shiny reddish shoots on separate plants, appear before the leaves. Fruits are small waxy berries. Also called Sweet Gale.

DISTRIBUTION

Locally common in boggy areas on moors and heaths in western Europe.

USES In Yorkshire, leaves were used for flavouring beer (gale beer) before hops became popular. Leaves and berries can be dried and used for flavouring soups and stews.

Common Nettle

Urtica dioica

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Coarse perennial to 1.5m tall, covered with stinging hairs. Leaves are ovate, pointed and toothed. Flowers are greenish, small and form axillary spikes.

DISTRIBUTION Found throughout northern temperate regions.

USES Aerial parts are rich in vitamins A and C, and iron and other minerals. Young leaves may be added to soups and salads, or made into nettle pudding or beer. Old plants can be toxic and should not be eaten uncooked.



Sandalwood

Santalum album

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Small evergreen tree to about 10m tall, with slender drooping branches and smooth grey-brown bark. Flowers are bell-shaped, initially dull yellow, turning reddish-purple. Fruits are about 10mm across, and dark red to black. Sandalwood is semi-parasitic on other plants. Also called Indian Sandalwood and Sandalwood Oil Plant.

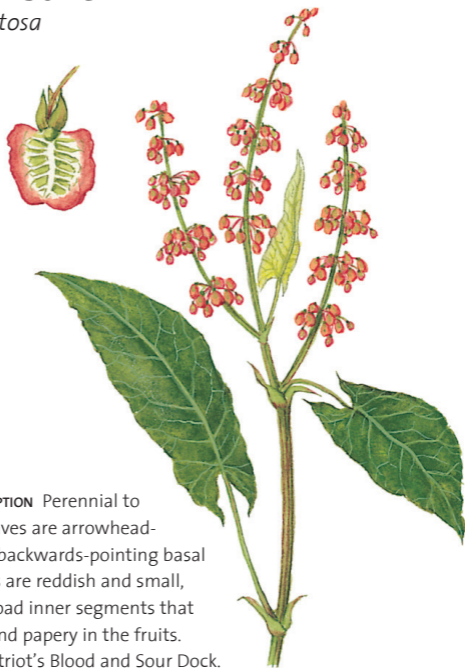
DISTRIBUTION Possibly native to Indonesia, and cultivated across tropical Asia.

USES Essential oil has a characteristic sensuous aroma and has been extracted from the plant for centuries for use in perfumes, incense and cosmetics. It is soothing and relaxing, and said to help promote restful sleep. Heartwood yields medicinal extracts that are used to treat bronchitis and cystitis.



Common Sorrel

Rumex acetosa



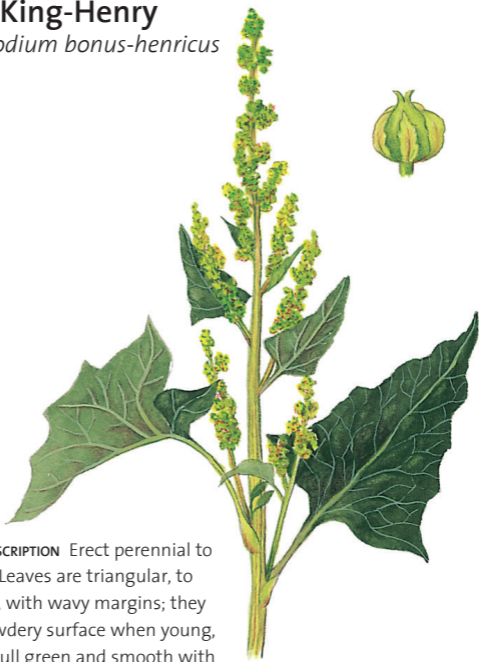
SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 60cm tall. Leaves are arrowhead-shaped, with backwards-pointing basal lobes. Flowers are reddish and small, with three broad inner segments that become red and papery in the fruits. Also called Patriot's Blood and Sour Dock.

DISTRIBUTION Widespread in northern temperate regions, and cultivated in gardens.

USES Salad pot herb from ancient times; tastes metallic if cooked in an iron pan. Leaves are high in vitamin C, and oxalic acid gives them a tangy acid taste. They can be added to salads, soups and vegetable dishes, and sorrel purée is a good complement to fish and egg dishes.

Good-King-Henry

Chenopodium bonus-henricus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Erect perennial to 50cm tall. Leaves are triangular, to 10cm long, with wavy margins; they have a powdery surface when young, and turn dull green and smooth with age. Flowers are very small, greenish and borne on spikes.

DISTRIBUTION Widespread but local throughout Europe, except the south-east.

USES Young leaves can be eaten raw in salads, older leaves cooked in stews and soups, and young shoots cooked like asparagus. Seeds have a laxative effect. Avoid the plant if suffering from a kidney complaint or rheumatism.

Fat-hen

Chenopodium album

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Annual to 1.5m tall. Reddish stems are usually covered with a powdery white meal. Leaves are generally oval and pointed, with toothed margins. Flowers are whitish, and grow in small tight clusters on an open spike with leaves at the lower end.

DISTRIBUTION Common across Europe.

USES Young leaves and shoots can be eaten like spinach, or finely chopped and added to stews and soups. They are a good source of vitamin B₁, protein, iron and calcium.



Sea Beet

Beta vulgaris maritima

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Annual, biennial or perennial to 1m tall, usually bushy but sometimes sprawling. Leaves are shiny-green, oval or wedge-shaped, and pointed. Flowers are small, greenish and arranged in clusters on a branched spike. The wild ancestor of cultivated beets.

DISTRIBUTION Grows on the edges of salt marshes and along coastal footpaths in western and southern Europe; rarer further north.

USES Can be used in cooking in the same way as spinach. The tough midribs and large veins should be removed before cooking.



Sea Purslane

Atriplex portulacoides

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Sprawling, much-branched perennial to 1m tall, covered with silvery meal. Leaves are opposite, oval, thick and fleshy. Flowers are small and arranged in branched short clusters. Also called Lesser Shrubby Orach and Purslane Orach.

DISTRIBUTION Widely distributed in salt marshes and coastal dunes in temperate Eurasia and parts of Africa.

USES Thick, succulent young leaves are edible and can be eaten raw in salads or cooked.



Common Chickweed

Stellaria media

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Creeping annual to 30cm tall. Much-branched stems bear pairs of pointed oval leaves. Flowers have deeply divided white petals that are slightly shorter than the sepals.

DISTRIBUTION Fast-growing plant native to Europe, but spread by humans and now found in most of the world.

USES Main culinary use is as an addition to salads, or boiled as a vegetable. Leaves contain vitamin C. Also made into an ointment or poultice for inflamed skin, ulcers and chilblains.



Clove Pink

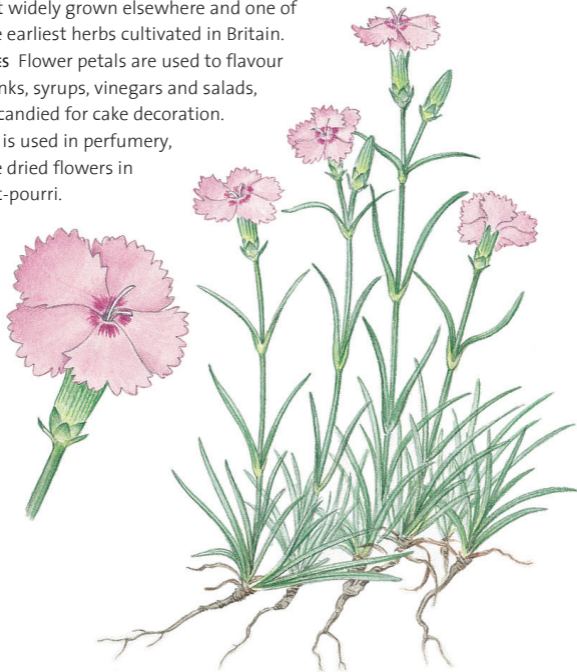
Dianthus caryophyllus

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial with a woody base, and stems to 50cm tall. Leaves are bluish-green and narrow, and grow in pairs. Petals are rose-pink and frilled at the margins. Flowers are fragrant, with a clove-like spicy scent and flavour.

DISTRIBUTION Native to southern Europe and North Africa, but widely grown elsewhere and one of the earliest herbs cultivated in Britain.

USES Flower petals are used to flavour drinks, syrups, vinegars and salads, or candied for cake decoration.

Oil is used in perfumery, the dried flowers in pot-pourri.



Monk's-hood

Aconitum napellus

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Erect perennial to 1m tall, with paired blackish taproots. Leaves are palmately lobed, with the lobes themselves deeply cut. Flowers are mauve or bluish, with five petal-like sepals, the upper one forming a cowl-like hood. Also called Bear's Foot, Grandmother's Nightcap and Helmet Flower.

DISTRIBUTION Found across much of Europe and northern Asia as far east as the Himalayas.

USES All parts of the plant are poisonous, especially the roots, extracts of which were once used to tip arrows. Used in analgesics to treat pain; a herb that should only ever be prescribed by a qualified medical practitioner.



Opium Poppy

Papaver somniferum



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Erect bluish-green annual to 90cm tall. Leaves are pinnately lobed. Flowers have four papery white, pink or purple petals, sometimes with a dark basal patch. Large globular capsule has holes around the rim to release the tiny seeds. Also called Dream Plant, Fairy's Charms and Flower of Venus.

DISTRIBUTION Probably of Mediterranean origin; now widespread as a cultivated and wild plant.

USES Ripe seeds are used in cooking, for sprinkling onto breads and cakes, and to make a salad oil. Raw opium, obtained from the milky sap of the unripe capsules, yields various medicinal drugs, including morphine and codeine. All parts except the ripe seeds, which do not contain high levels of opiates, should only be used on the advice of a trained medical professional.

Common Poppy

Papaver rhoeas



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Delicate erect, branching annual to 70cm tall.

Leaves are pinnately lobed.

Flowers have four papery red petals, each usually with a dark spot at the base.

Fruit is a globular capsule with many blue-black seeds. Also called African Rose, Headache Plant, Flanders Poppy and Wind Rose.

DISTRIBUTION Common in much of Europe; rarer in the north.

USES Seeds are used in cakes and confectionery, sprinkled over pastries, breads and biscuits, and made into an oil similar in quality to olive oil. Unlike the seeds of Opium Poppy (opposite), they do not contain narcotic opiates.

Bloodroot

Sanguinaria canadensis



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Early-flowering woodland perennial to 30cm tall, with blood-red roots. Flowers are white with 8–10 petals, and usually appear before the leaves. Also called Red Puccoon and Snakebite.

DISTRIBUTION Native to eastern and central North America.

USES Poisonous except in mild doses. Fresh root was once used by Native Americans to treat chest and lung ailments. Its only current commercial use is as a constituent of toothpastes and mouthwashes for combating plaque.

Garlic Mustard

Alliaria petiolata



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Erect biennial to 1.2m tall. Leaves are heart-shaped, toothed at the margins and smell of garlic when bruised. Flowers are white with four petals, and are followed by slender fruits 6–20mm long. Also called Jack-by-the-Hedge.

DISTRIBUTION Found throughout Europe, North Africa, and western and central Asia.

USES Tastes mildly of garlic. Picked before flowering, the leaves can be used in salads and sauces.

Horseradish

Armoracia rusticana

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Robust perennial to 1.2m tall, with a stout taproot. Large leaves are glossy, stalked, oblong to ovate, and have toothed margins. Flowering stems are leafy, erect and branching. Flowers are white with four petals. Also called Red Cole.

DISTRIBUTION Native to southern Europe and western Asia; cultivated and naturalized in many temperate areas.

USES Grated and mixed with cream, the pungent acrid root yields horseradish sauce. Young leaves can be added to salads. Stimulatory and antibiotic properties; the herb is used for coughs and sinus congestion, and for urinary infections, gout, arthritis and circulatory problems.



Black Mustard

Brassica nigra



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Slender annual to 2m tall. Leaves are pinnately cut and bristly, with the terminal lobe much larger than the other lobes. Flowers are yellow with four petals. Fruits are slender-beaked, contain dark brown seeds and are pressed against the stem.

DISTRIBUTION Widespread throughout most temperate regions, and commonly cultivated.

USES Leaves and flowers can be used in salads, stir-fries and sandwiches, ground seeds to make a mustard condiment. Warming stimulant with an antibiotic effect; used to ease muscular pain and for respiratory tract infections.

White Mustard

Sinapis alba

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Similar to Black Mustard (page 29), but flowers are slightly larger and fruits have broad beaks and spread out from the stem. Seeds are pale.

Also called Salad Mustard and Yellow Mustard.

DISTRIBUTION

Occurs across most of Europe and the Near East; introduced into many other areas.

USES Similar to those of Black Mustard.

White form is milder.

Whole seeds are added to pickles, and seedlings can be used with cress in salads and sandwiches.



Water-cress

Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial to 60cm tall, with creeping rooting stems that grow upwards to flower. Leaves are glossy, and pinnate with rounded leaflets. Flowers are white, small and have four petals. Fruits are slender, with seeds in two rows on each side.

DISTRIBUTION Grows in shallow water in most of Europe, North Africa and western Asia.

USES Leaves have a pungent hot taste, and a high vitamin and mineral content, particularly of vitamin C and iron. They may be used in soups and salads, but can be confused with unrelated poisonous species; additionally, in some areas wild plants harbour parasitic liver flukes that can damage the liver. Wild plants are therefore best avoided. Antibacterial and antifungal properties; used for respiratory tract ailments.

Common Scurvygrass

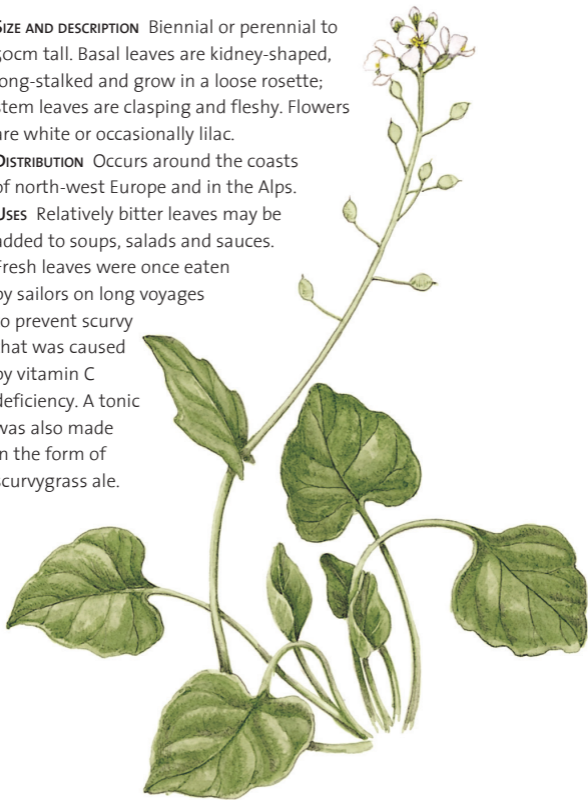
Cochlearia officinalis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Biennial or perennial to 50cm tall. Basal leaves are kidney-shaped, long-stalked and grow in a loose rosette; stem leaves are clasping and fleshy. Flowers are white or occasionally lilac.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs around the coasts of north-west Europe and in the Alps.

USES Relatively bitter leaves may be added to soups, salads and sauces.

Fresh leaves were once eaten by sailors on long voyages to prevent scurvy that was caused by vitamin C deficiency. A tonic was also made in the form of scurvygrass ale.



Winter-cress

Barbarea vulgaris



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Stout perennial or biennial to 80cm tall, with upright branches. Lower leaves are pinnately lobed; upper leaves are smaller and have wavy margins. Yellow flowers are borne in terminal clusters. Also called Bittercress, Poor Man's Cabbage and Yellow Rocket.

DISTRIBUTION Common throughout much of Europe.

USES Hot taste similar to that of Water-cress (page 31). Once commonly cultivated in Europe as a salad vegetable. Leaves may be cooked and used like spinach, and young shoots can be steamed or stir-fried.

Hairy Bitter-cress

Cardamine hirsuta

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Annual to 30cm tall, with upright stems. Leaves are pinnate with oval leaflets. Flowers are small, white and borne in loose terminal clusters. Fruits are long and narrow pods. Also called Lamb's Cress.

DISTRIBUTION Common throughout Europe.

USES Sharp flavour that is not as hot as that of Water-cress (page 31). May be used in salads or cooked like spinach.



Shepherd's-purse

Capsella bursa-pastoris



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Annual or biennial to 40cm tall. Basal rosette of pinnately divided leaves; stem leaves are stalkless and clasping. Minute white flowers are borne in loose spikes. Fruits are heart-shaped capsules resembling the purses people used to hang from their belts in the Middle Ages, hence the plant's common name.

DISTRIBUTION Common throughout Europe.

USES Young leaves, collected before the plant flowers, may be added to salads, soups, sauces and stews, and stir-fried. As a herbal remedy, used mainly for haemorrhages.

Field Penny-cress

Thlaspi arvense



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Annual to 50cm tall. First leaves are oval and pointed, forming a basal rosette; stem leaves are clasp-like, with arrow-shaped bases and toothed margins. Flowers are small, with white petals, and are arranged in an ascending spike. Fruits are large heart-shaped capsules. Also called Boor's Mustard, French Weed, Stinkweed and Treaclewort.

DISTRIBUTION Common throughout much of Europe, but less frequent in the north.

USES Slightly bitter flavour. Small amounts may be finely chopped and added to salads, soups and sauces.

Caper

Capparis spinosa

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Shrubby perennial with straggly and sometimes spiny branches to 1.5m long. Leaves are fleshy, and circular to ovate. Flowers are white or pinkish-white, four-petalled and have a mass of long purplish stamens in the centre.

DISTRIBUTION Native to parts of the tropics and subtropics, and to cliffs and rocky sites in the Mediterranean.

USES Contains capric acid, and is used as a condiment and in sauces such as sauce tartare. Only the unopened flower buds are eaten, and these must be pickled in wine vinegar in order to bring out the typical flavour.



Cinnamon

Cinnamomum zeylanicum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Small evergreen tree to 10m tall. Leaves are paired, ovate to elliptical, deeply veined and dark shiny-green. Flowers grow in small, branched yellow clusters, and are followed by dark purple berries. Spice is provided by the fragrant dried inner bark of the young shoots.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Sri Lanka and the south-west coast of India; cultivated elsewhere in the east and in the West Indies.

USES Commonly used as a spice in baking, and in drinks like punch. As a remedy, used for coughs, colds and stomach complaints.



Cassia

Cinnamomum aromaticum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Closely related to Cinnamon (opposite), though making a larger tree. Spice is obtained from three parts of the tree. Also called Bastard Cinnamon.

DISTRIBUTION Native to China and Burma, and cultivated in many areas of the subtropics.

USES Dried inner bark is very similar to that of Cinnamon and is often used as a substitute for it, though the quills are coarser in both texture and flavour. Dried leaves are used mainly in Indian cooking. Dried unripe fruits are sometimes sold as Chinese cassia buds, and used to flavour sweets and drinks.



Sweet Bay

Laurus nobilis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Bushy evergreen tree to 20m tall. Leaves are wavy-edged and dotted with numerous oil glands; they give off a strong spicy scent when bruised. Flowers are yellowish-green and four-petalled, with males and females on separate trees. Also called Bay Tree, Poet's Laurel, Roman Laurel and Royal Bay.

DISTRIBUTION Native to dry areas of the Mediterranean, and now widely grown elsewhere both as a pot herb and a clipped shrub.

USES Once employed as a strewing herb, and the leafy branches formed the laurel wreaths of ancient Greece. In Roman culture, laurel wreaths were used as a symbol of victory. A culinary flavouring used both dry and fresh since ancient times, in soups, stews and other dishes.



Star-anise

Illicium verum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

White-barked evergreen shrub or small tree to 5m tall, with large leaves and small, many-petalled yellow flowers. 'Fruit' consists of eight single-seeded pods that radiate from a central point, forming a star. Also called Chinese Anise.

DISTRIBUTION Native to southern China, where it is also cultivated, and to north-east Vietnam.

USES Fruits are harvested unripe and dried. An essential ingredient in Asian cuisines, and used to flavour dishes such as beef and fish stews. Oil of anise is used to flavour drinks. Fruit or seed infusions are used for sore throats and digestive complaints. Not suitable for young children, in which it may cause vomiting and seizures.



Ylang-Ylang

Cananga odorata



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Evergreen tree to 33m tall, with smooth ashy bark. Leaves are large and wavy-edged. Flowers are large and drooping, greenish at first, then turning yellow, with six narrow petals about 75mm long; they have a jasmine-like scent. Also called Macassa Oil.

DISTRIBUTION Native from tropical Asia to Australia, and cultivated elsewhere in the Far East. Also grown in temperate climates under conservatory conditions.

USES Flowers yield a heavily scented oil with relaxing anti-depressant properties, which is used in aromatherapy. Long-term or excessive use may cause headaches and nausea.

Biting Stonecrop

Sedum acre



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Tufted evergreen perennial to 10cm tall. Leaves are fleshy and swollen, crowded on short sterile shoots, and more widely spaced on flowering ones. Star-shaped flowers are bright yellow.

DISTRIBUTION Found across Europe, northern and western Asia, North Africa and North America.

USES Dried and ground leaves have a hot peppery taste and are sometimes recommended as a seasoning, but are slightly poisonous. Once a medicinal herb used for epilepsy and skin diseases, but now used mainly as a corn remover.

Raspberry

Rubus idaeus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial with erect, woody biennial stems to 1.5m tall, armed with weak straight prickles. Leaves are pinnate, with 5–7 leaflets that are densely white-hairy beneath. Nodding flowers are white, and borne in small clusters.

DISTRIBUTION Native to cool regions of Europe, and northern and central Asia, and widely cultivated.

USES Yields popular edible fruits, which may be eaten raw and used in jams, syrups, cordial wines and vinegars. Raspberry-leaf tea is used for various childhood chills and fevers, and during the later stages of pregnancy as a muscle toner in preparation for childbirth.

Dog-rose

Rosa canina



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

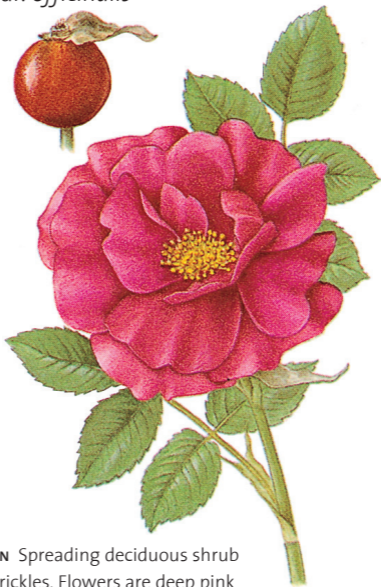
Deciduous and often scrambling shrub to 5m tall, with stout hooked prickles and pink or white flowers. Fruits (hips) may be globose, ovoid or elliptical. Also called Briar Rose, Cankerberrry, Canker Rose and Dog Brier.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Europe, North Africa and parts of Asia, and naturalized in North America.

USES Hips contain more vitamin C than citrus fruits. If collected after the first autumn frosts, when they have softened and sweetened, they can be made into soups, wines, herbal teas, syrups, jams and jellies. Petals may be used in salads and fragrant jellies, as well as in perfumes and pot-pourris.

Apothecary's Rose

Rosa gallica var. *officinalis*



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Spreading deciduous shrub to 1m tall, with prickles. Flowers are deep pink and very fragrant. Fruits are bright red and globose.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Europe from Belgium southwards.

USES Both a culinary and medicinal plant, used for flavourings, perfumes, powders and oils. Hips are used in jams and jellies. Petals can be crystallized or used to make rose-petal jam. They were once used for strewing and can be added to pot-pourri. Oil distilled from the flowers is used in aromatherapy for tension, emotional stress and insomnia.

Meadowsweet

Filipendula ulmaria



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 2m tall.

Leaves are pinnate, with pairs of large toothed leaflets interspaced with much smaller ones. Flowers are creamy-white, have a cloying scent and are crowded into frothy sprays to 25cm long.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs in most of the temperate northern hemisphere.

USES Flowers can be used in a syrup for cooling drinks and fruit salads, leaves to flavour preserves. Contains the chemicals that produce aspirin, and an infusion from the fresh flowers is employed for conditions in which aspirin would normally be used.

Agrimony

Agrimonia eupatoria

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial with mostly basal leaves and a long flower spike to 60cm tall. Leaves are pinnate, with 2–3 pairs of small leaflets between each pair of large ones.

Flowers are yellow and have five petals.

Fruits are crowned with hooked bristles.

Also called Beggar's Lice and Church Steeples.

DISTRIBUTION Native throughout Europe extending into Asia Minor and North Africa.

USES Green aerial parts contain a high proportion of tannins, which make the herb useful as a gargle and digestive tonic. Long used as a wound treatment, and recent research suggests that it may increase blood coagulation.



Salad Burnet

Sanguisorba minor



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial with a basal rosette of pinnate leaves and a leafy flowering stem to 50cm tall. Flowers are small and greenish, with four sepals but no petals; they are tightly packed into globose or ovoid flower heads. Also called Pimpernelle.

DISTRIBUTION Found in dry grassland in most of Europe, parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

USES Leaves have a mild cucumber flavour. When young, they are good in salads and soups, and as a flavouring for soft cheeses. The plant often remains green during the winter months, and was once much grown at times when fresh salad vegetables were scarce.

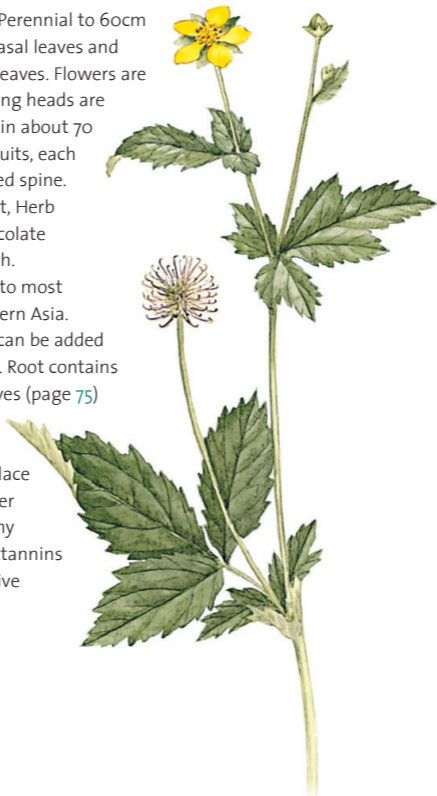
Wood Avens

Geum urbanum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 60cm tall, with pinnate basal leaves and deeply lobed stem leaves. Flowers are bright yellow. Fruiting heads are burr-like, and contain about 70 narrow and hairy fruits, each tipped with a hooked spine. Also called Colewort, Herb Bennet, Indian Chocolate and Star of the Earth.

DISTRIBUTION Native to most of Europe and western Asia.

USES Young leaves can be added to soups and stews. Root contains the same oil as Cloves (page 75) and is similarly antiseptic; it has also been used in place of quinine to counter fevers. Like Agrimony (page 48), contains tannins that act as a digestive tonic.



Parsley-piert

Aphanes arvensis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Small annual to 10cm tall. Deeply lobed, parsley-like leaves are divided into three segments, each with up to five lobes at the tip. Tiny flowers are borne in clusters in leafy cups on the stem. Also called Bowel-hive Grass and Fire Grass.

DISTRIBUTION Common in arable fields and on bare ground throughout Europe.

USES Has a mild acidic flavour that makes it useful as an addition to salads. In herbal medicine, used to help kidney and bladder complaints.



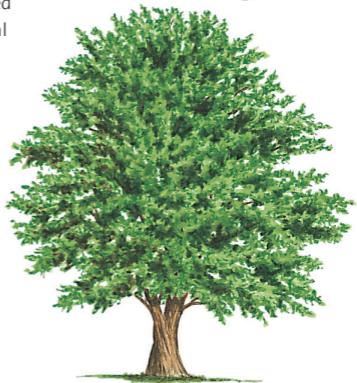
Hawthorn

Crataegus monogyna

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Thorny deciduous tree to 18m tall. Leaves are dark green and deeply lobed. Flowers are white and fruits are dark or bright red. Also called May and Hedgerow Thorn.

DISTRIBUTION Found across Europe and much of Asia.

USES A liqueur can be made from the berries. Buds and young leaves have a light and delicate taste, and can be added to salads. May help to remedy high or low blood pressure, as well as problems associated with the heart such as arterial spasms and angina.



Whitebeam

Sorbus aria

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Deciduous tree to 12m tall, sometimes with several trunks; smooth grey bark and an irregularly domed crown. Alternate oval leaves have irregular teeth, and are bright green above and paler green beneath. Flowers are white and grow in branched clusters. Fruits are scarlet. Also called Beam Tree and Chess Apple.

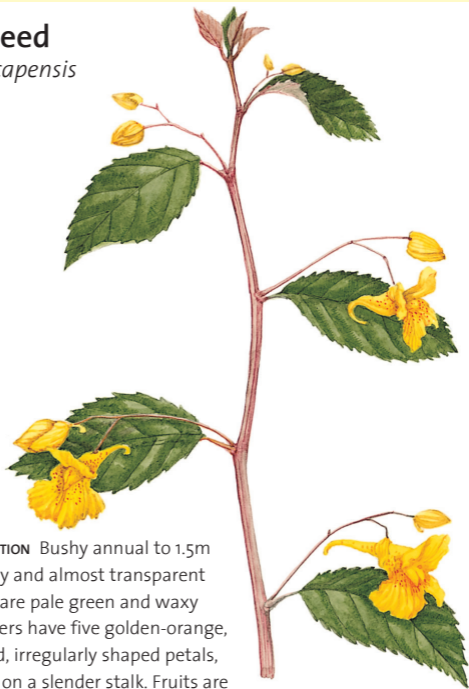
DISTRIBUTION Native to southern Britain, as well as to central and southern Europe.

USES Fruits are bitter at first, and best stored until very ripe before use to bring out their sweetness. They may be made into jellies; when dried and ground into a coarse powder they can be added to breakfast cereal, as well as to bread and cake mixes.



Jewel Weed

Impatiens capensis



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Bushy annual to 1.5m tall, with fleshy and almost transparent stems. Leaves are pale green and waxy beneath. Flowers have five golden-orange, brown-spotted, irregularly shaped petals, and are borne on a slender stalk. Fruits are dry capsules. Also called Orange Balsam.

DISTRIBUTION Native to North America, and naturalized in parts of Europe.

USES Young leaves and stems may be eaten raw in salads or steamed like a vegetable. Green seedpods can be stir-fried or eaten raw. Best known for its skin-healing properties: leaves and juice are used for rashes from poison ivy, nettles and other plants, insect bites and bee stings, and other types of dermatitis.

Broom

Cytisus scoparius

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Much-branched shrub to 2m tall, with slender whippy twigs that are green and ridged. Small trifoliate or undivided leaves often appear very early. Flowers are yellow, pea-like and numerous. Pods are flattened and oblong, hairy on the margins and black when ripe. Also called Besom, Green Broom and Scots Broom.

DISTRIBUTION Widespread in most of Europe.

USES Pickled flower buds were an Elizabethan culinary item. Contains the alkaloid sparteine, which is used in cardiac treatment and obstetrics, and is a strong diuretic. Should only be used under medical supervision.



Liquorice

Glycyrrhiza glabra

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Rhizomatous perennial with erect stems to 1.2m tall. Leaves are pinnately divided, the leaflets sticky beneath. Flowers are bluish-purple, small, pea-like and borne in axillary spikes. Also called Spanish Juice Plant and Sweetwood, and Mulaithi in northern India.

DISTRIBUTION Native to southern Europe and western Asia; also cultivated.

USES A popular sweet, and used as a flavouring for some beers, soft drinks and various

herbal teas. Roots contain glycyrrhizin, which is approximately 50 times sweeter than sugar. Used as a laxative and for heartburn, stomach ulcers, colds and coughs, as well as to mask the flavour of unpleasant-tasting medicines.



Fenugreek

Trigonella foenum-graecum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Annual to 50cm tall, with trifoliate leaves that have toothed leaflets.

Pea-like flowers are yellow-white and tinged violet at the bases. Pods are to 14cm long, narrow and slightly curved, with as many as 20 very hard, yellow-brown seeds. Also called Greek Clover and Greek Hay.

DISTRIBUTION Probably native to south-west Asia, and widely naturalized and cultivated in southern and central Europe and elsewhere.

USES One of the oldest cultivated plants in the world, recorded in

Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) as far back as 4000BC. Seeds are often added to curries and preserves; when grown like cress, they impart a mild curry flavour to salads. Rich in vitamins and minerals, particularly calcium, and thought to be good for the digestion.



Alexandrian Senna

Senna alexandrina



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Small shrub about 50cm tall. Leaves are pinnate with all the lanceolate leaflets in pairs. Flowers are yellow, five-petalled and borne in erect loose spikes. Pods are about 2.5cm wide and flattened. Also called True Senna.

DISTRIBUTION Native to semi-desert regions of Somalia and Yemen, and cultivated in Asia.

USES Sennas are probably the best-known laxatives; the active chemicals, called anthroquinone glycosides, are found in the leaves and, particularly, the pods. Usually mixed in a syrup with other herbs and spices such as Cinnamon, Ginger or Liquorice to make it more palatable.

Tamarind

Tamarindus indica

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Densely foliated evergreen tree to 30m tall. Leaves are pinnately divided into 10–20 pairs of closely set leaflets. Flowers are small, creamy yellow and red-veined. Pods are pendulous and brown, to 2cm long, and contain seeds embedded in a yellow pulp. Also called Indian Date.

DISTRIBUTION

Possibly native to tropical Africa, although it is



unknown in the wild. Widely cultivated in

India and other tropical parts of the world.

USES Usually sold as a paste or a block that is soaked in hot water and sieved before use. Sharp rich flavour makes it useful as a culinary aid in curries, chutneys, sauces and drinks. Used locally for fevers brought on by the hot winds. Rich in glucosides, and citric, tartaric and malic acids.

Nasturtium

Tropaeolum majus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Sprawling or climbing annual with stems to 2m long. Leaves are parasol-shaped; stalk is attached to the centre of the blade.

Flowers are orange, yellow or red, to 60mm across and with a backwards-pointing spur. Fruits are three-lobed.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Peru, and widely cultivated in a variety of other colour forms.

USES Peppery-tasting flowers can be added to salads, the flowers and leaves used for tea, and the young pickled fruits used instead of the buds of Caper (page 37). All parts are rich in vitamin C and antibiotic sulphur compounds that may combat infection. More than 15g at a time should not be eaten.

Rose-scented Geranium

Pelargonium graveolens

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial to 2m tall, with fragrant, palmately lobed leaves. Flowers are pink or mauve, and are carried in loose umbels. Also called Rose Geranium.

DISTRIBUTION Native to South Africa, and grown in most parts of the world.

USES Introduced to England in the mid-17th century, and frequently used by the Victorians as houseplants to scent the home. One of the ornamental garden

geraniums, which yield fragrances such as rose, lemon and mint. This species has rose-scented foliage, and the fresh or dried leaves may be used to flavour custards, ice creams, jellies, cakes and dessert sauces. Essential oil from the plant is used in perfumery, cosmetics and aromatherapy. Also used in food flavourings, and in fragrant items for the home such as pot-pourri and scented candles.



Castor Oil Plant

Ricinus communis



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Robust suckering perennial to 12m tall. Leaves are palmate, glossy and to 45cm across with 5–9 lobes.

Spikes are stout, with greenish male flowers below prickly-looking

reddish clusters of female flowers. Fruits are greenish to reddish-purple, to 2cm long, globular and spiky. Also called Jonah's Gourd, Mole Bean, Palms of Christ and Steadfast.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the tropics, and widely grown and naturalized in many areas.

USES Castor oil is obtained from the crushed seeds, and is used in engine fuels, lubricants, paints, varnishes and insect repellents. It is also a mild laxative. Seeds contain the poison ricin and are very toxic.

Rue

Ruta graveolens



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Aromatic evergreen shrub to 45cm tall. Leaves are grey-green and pinnately divided. Flowers have four yellow petals, each with an incurved hooded tip.

Also called Bitter Herb, Herb of Grace and Serving Man's Joy.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the eastern Mediterranean, and widely grown and sometimes naturalized elsewhere.

USES Aerial parts yield an oil that is used in small doses to strengthen blood vessels and treat colic. Sometimes taken as a bitter tea to expel worms. Sap can cause a strong allergic reaction on contact with the skin. Toxic in large doses and should only be used under medical supervision, and never during pregnancy.

Frankincense

Boswellia sacra

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Evergreen shrub or small, papery-barked tree to 6m tall. Leaves are pinnate, with spike-like clusters of small, waxy white flowers in their axils.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Somalia and Arabia.

Recent studies have indicated that the trees are declining because of over-exploitation.

USES A major ingredient of sacred incense, known to have been employed since ancient times by cultures including the



Egyptians, Babylonians and ancient Greeks. Frankincense is extracted from the gum-like resin of several closely related species, of which this is one of the most important. When employed in aromatherapy, the oil is usually blended with other oils, and used for wounds, scars, and bacterial and fungal infections. Frankincense oil is also used as an ingredient in soaps, cosmetics and perfumes.

Surinam Quassia-wood

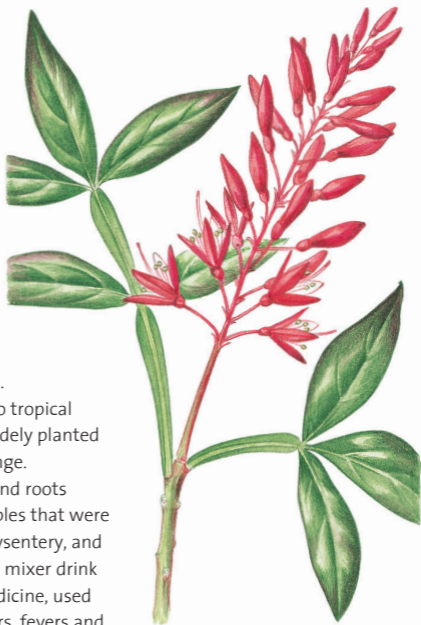
Quassia amara

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Shrub or small tree to 3m tall (rarely to 8m). Leaves are pinnate, and divided into five leaflets. Flowers are bright red on the outside and white inside, tubular and borne in clusters at the ends of the twigs. Also called Bitter Ash and Bitter Wood.

DISTRIBUTION Native to tropical America, and also widely planted outside its native range.

USES Both the bark and roots contain bitter principles that were once used to treat dysentery, and are the source of the mixer drink bitters. In herbal medicine, used for digestive disorders, fevers and intestinal worms, and can be applied topically as an insect repellent. Surinam Quassia-wood should not be confused with the green-flowered tree from the West Indies, Quassia-wood (*Picrasma excelsa*), from which wood chips boiled in water provide an insecticide.



Cascara Sagrada

Rhamnus purshiana

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Small deciduous shrub or tree to 12m tall, with pale greyish bark. Leaves are prominently veined, and there are clusters of tiny greenish flowers in the axils. Berries are initially bright red, turning purplish-black when ripe. Also called Californian Bearberry.

DISTRIBUTION Native to North America.

USES Dried, aged bark was used for centuries by Native Americans as a laxative. Combined

with pleasantly aromatic herbs, it is used for frail or convalescent people, and by vets for treating dogs. It is exported to Europe, where it has replaced remedies derived from local species. Although used by immigrant Americans since the late 19th century, it is now banned in over-the-counter medicines due to its detrimental association with side effects on the digestion and potentially carcinogenic effects. It should only be used under medical supervision.



Lime

Tilia x vulgaris



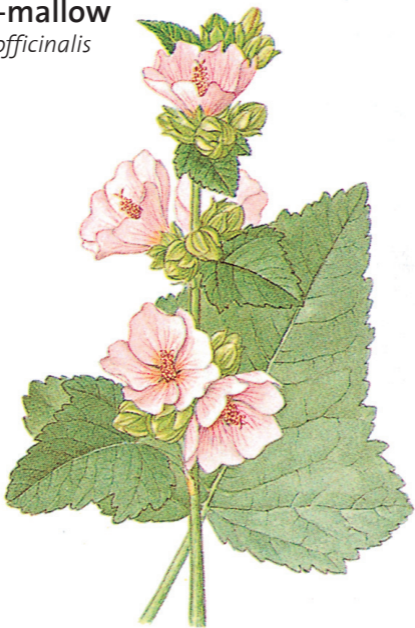
SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Tall and narrow-crowned deciduous tree to 46m tall. Leaves are broad, heart-shaped and often sticky with sap. Flowers are yellowish-white, fragrant and hang in a cluster beneath an oblong wing-like bract.

DISTRIBUTION Naturally occurring hybrid between two European species; widely planted as a street tree.

USES Tea made from the fragrant flowers may be used for nervous disorders, migraines and insomnia. Flowers may also be beneficial for certain circulatory disorders, and for colds and bronchial complaints.

Marsh-mallow

Althaea officinalis



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Densely grey-hairy perennial to 2m tall. Leaves are large-toothed and sometimes palmately lobed. Flowers are lilac-pink with shallowly notched petals, and grow on tall spikes.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Europe, North Africa and western Asia.

USES A sweet is made from the roots. Young leaves and flowers may be used in salads. Plant has a high mucilage content, and is used to reduce inflammation of the stomach, make a gargle for throat and mouth infections, and relieve pain from cystitis.

Common Mallow

Malva sylvestris



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 1.5m tall, with a thick and hairy stem that may be erect or spreading. Leaves are round with 3–5 shallow, blunt and toothed lobes, covered in fine down. Flowers have five mauve petals with deep purple lines converging at the centres.

DISTRIBUTION Common across Europe except the far north.

USES Young leaves and shoots have a very mild flavour and a mucilaginous texture. They may be used in salads, finely chopped in soups and stews, or as a cooked vegetable. Flowers can be used in salads. Medicinally less potent than Marsh-mallow (opposite).

Perforate St John's-wort

Hypericum perforatum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Rhizomatous perennial to 80cm tall, the woody-based stems with two raised ridges. Leaves are stalkless and dotted with numerous translucent glands. Flowers are yellow and bear many stamens. Also called Devil's Scourge, Klamath Weed, Penny John and Rosin Rose.

DISTRIBUTION

Widespread in temperate regions.

USES Foliage has an antibacterial effect. Oil from the flowers is used for dressing wounds, sunburn, neuralgia, anxiety and depression. The herb can affect several prescription drugs, and if taking any, a qualified professional must be consulted.



Sweet Violet

Viola odorata

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Creeping perennial to 15cm tall, with a rosette of kidney-shaped leaves and long rooting stolons. Long-stalked flowers are spurred, and dark violet or white. Also called English Violet, March Violet and Sweet Pansy.

DISTRIBUTION Native throughout much of Europe.

USES Flowers form the base for perfume and for a wine. They can be candied and used as cake decorations, and added fresh to salads and desserts. Contains methyl salicylate, from which aspirin is derived, and is a traditional treatment for headaches. Tea made from the leaves, or a syrup made from the flowers, is used to soothe bronchial complaints and coughs.



Heartsease

Viola tricolor



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Branching hairless or downy-hairy annual, biennial or perennial to 12cm tall. Lower leaves are ovate, upper leaves oblong. Flowers are yellow, violet or bicoloured, and unequal; the lower petal bears a spur 6mm long. Also called Wild Pansy and Love Lies Bleeding.

DISTRIBUTION Most of Europe.

USES Flowers can be added to salads or used to decorate desserts. Has been used for gout, arthritis and respiratory disorders, and in ointment form for eczema and acne.

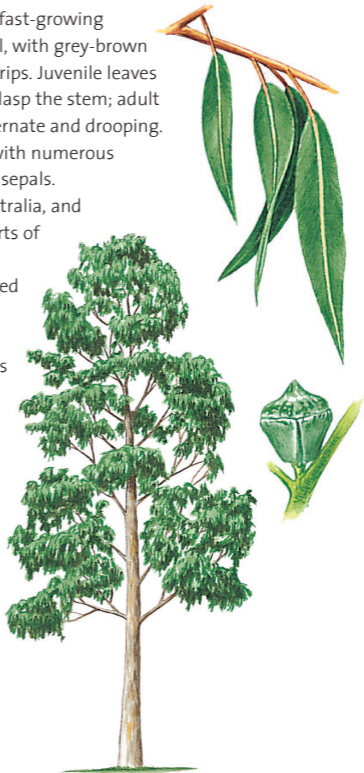
Tasmanian Blue Gum

Eucalyptus globus

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Large, fast-growing evergreen tree to 40m tall, with grey-brown bark that peels away in strips. Juvenile leaves are bluish, opposite and clasp the stem; adult leaves are dark green, alternate and drooping. Flowers are woody cups with numerous stamens and no petals or sepals.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Australia, and planted in many other parts of the world.

USES Eucalyptus oil, distilled from the adult leaves, is a strong antiseptic. Used in aromatherapy in inhalants and decongestants, as a chest rub for coughs, and as a component of cough sweets and pastilles.



Allspice

Pimenta dioica

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Evergreen tree to 9m tall, with opposite leathery leaves to 15cm long. Flowers are cream and white, and four-petalled; male and female flowers are carried in clusters on separate trees. Fruits ripen from green to purple. Also called Jamaica Pepper and Pimento Bush.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the West Indies, and to Central and South America; mainly cultivated in Jamaica, with a

few other central American countries growing it in small quantities.

USES An important ingredient in Caribbean cuisine. So named because its flavour combines those of Cinnamon, Cloves and Nutmeg. Green fruits are picked unripe, dried and ground. Rind is the most aromatic part. Used in pickles, drinks, preserves and baking, and added to many spice mixtures. Oil from the berries is used as an antiseptic.



Cloves

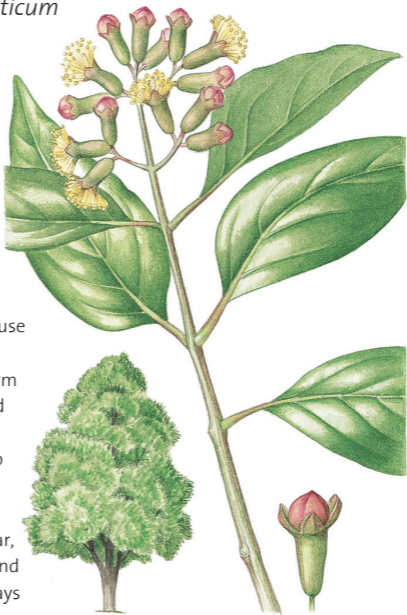
Syzygium aromaticum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Small evergreen tree to 15m tall, with paired leaves. Clustered flower buds are at first pale, turning green and finally bright red. The flowers are seldom seen on cultivated trees because the unopened flower buds, when dried, form the cloves. Also called Zanzibar Red Head.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the Molucca Islands, Indonesia, and cultivated on Zanzibar, and in Madagascar and the West Indies; always grown near the sea.

USES Cloves are used both whole and powdered to spice a variety of culinary dishes; they are particularly associated with apples. Oil of cloves is used in the perfume industry, as an insect repellent and as an analgesic, particularly to counter toothache.



Common Evening-primrose

Oenothera biennis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Biennial with a fleshy root and leafy stems to 1.5m tall. Flowers are yellow, four-petaled, fragrant and open in the evening. Fruits are long and slender, and contain numerous tiny seeds.

DISTRIBUTION Native to North America, and naturalized in most of Europe.

USES Root may be boiled and has a sweet flavour like parsnip. Leaves, seeds and root are used either as an infusion or for extracting an oil. Used for a variety of conditions, including premenstrual syndrome, hyperactivity, high blood pressure and arthritis, and widely employed in cosmetics.



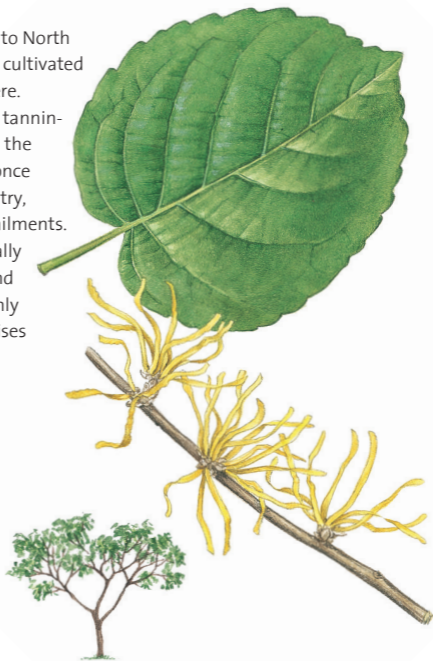
Witch-hazel

Hamamelis virginiana

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Deciduous shrub or small tree to 5m tall, with smooth greyish bark. Downy-hairy leaves are widest above the middle, with scalloped margins. Flowers are yellow, appearing in clusters after the leaves have fallen; petals are strap-shaped and very narrow.

DISTRIBUTION Native to North America, and often cultivated in gardens elsewhere.

USES An astringent tannin-rich tea made from the bark or twigs was once used to treat dysentery, cholera and other ailments. Modern commercially distilled extracts and ointments are mainly used for minor bruises and scratches.



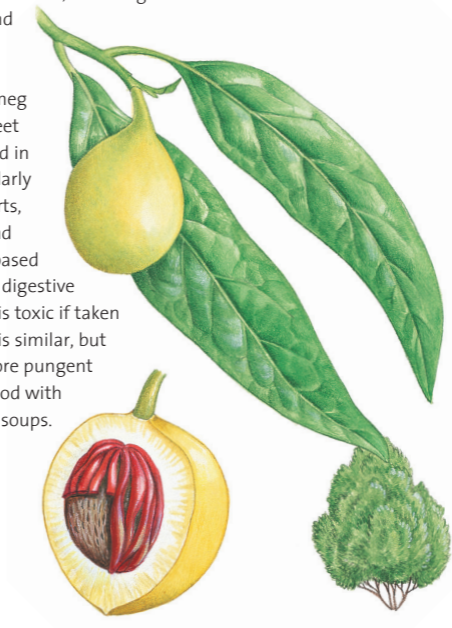
Nutmeg and Mace

Myristica fragrans

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Evergreen tree to 40m tall, with aromatic leaves and clusters of small pale yellow flowers, the males and females on separate trees. Fruits are large and fleshy, containing a kernel, the nutmeg, enclosed in a red net, the mace.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the Molucca Islands, but cultivated in wet seaside areas elsewhere, including the East and West Indies.

USES Nutmeg and mace are dried and usually sold separately. Nutmeg is a fragrant sweet spice used grated in cooking, particularly in baking, desserts, spiced drinks, and milk- or cream-based sauces, and as a digestive tonic, though it is toxic if taken in excess. Mace is similar, but stronger and more pungent smelling; it is good with fish and in clear soups.



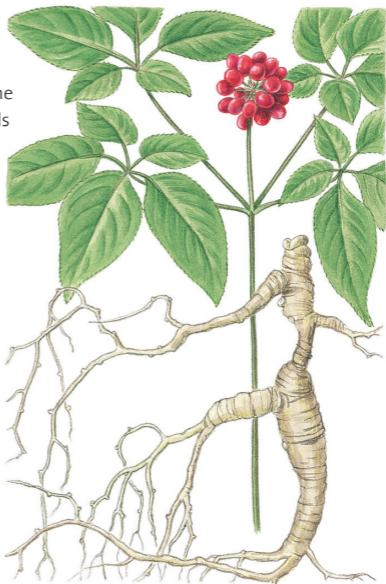
Chinese Ginseng

Panax ginseng

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 60cm tall, with a large root and a single whorl of palmate leaves at the top of the unbranched stem, from which emerges a long-stalked umbel of yellowish-green flowers followed by bright red fruits. Also called Korean Ginseng.

DISTRIBUTION Grows in the forests of north-east China.

USES Used in Chinese medicine for at least 5,000 years. The most highly prized of the ginsengs, regarded as a unique tonic, with the roots containing the hormone-like chemicals saponins and steroids. Reputed to counter the weakening effects of age, stress and disease, as well as to improve endurance and the ability to concentrate. Both Siberian Ginseng (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*) and American Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) are closely related to the Chinese species, and are used in similar ways.



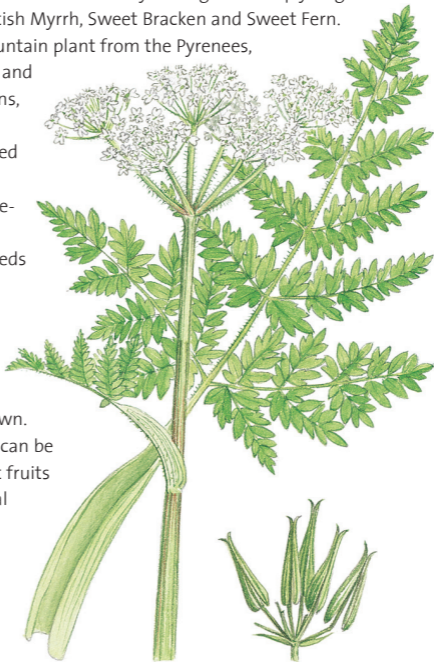
Sweet Cicely

Myrrhis odorata

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Softly hairy perennial to 1.5m tall, with hollow stems and foliage smelling strongly of aniseed when crushed. Leaves are 2–3-times pinnate with oblong, lanceolate, toothed and white-blotched lobes. Fruits are narrowly oblong and sharply ridged. Also called Anise, British Myrrh, Sweet Bracken and Sweet Fern.

DISTRIBUTION Mountain plant from the Pyrenees, Alps, Apennines and Balkan mountains, cultivated and widely naturalized elsewhere.

USES Sweet anise-flavoured leaves and aromatic seeds can be added to salads, whipped cream, yoghurt, light soups and dressings, or eaten on their own. Chopped leaves can be cooked with tart fruits and are a natural sweetener, safe for diabetics.



Chervil

Anthriscus cerefolium

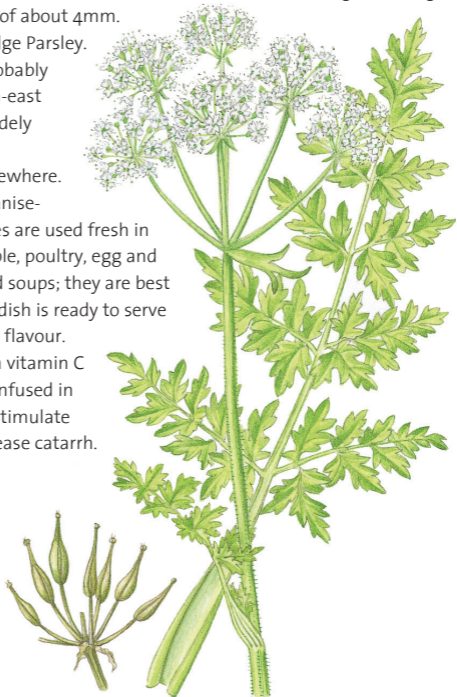
SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Rather wiry annual to 70cm tall. Leaves are bright green, much divided and pinnate, the lobes deeply cut. Flowers are small, white and borne in umbels. Fruits are to 10mm long, including a slender beak of about 4mm.

Also called Hedge Parsley.

DISTRIBUTION Probably native to south-east Europe, and widely cultivated and naturalized elsewhere.

USES Delicate anise-flavoured leaves are used fresh in salads, vegetable, poultry, egg and fish dishes, and soups; they are best added when a dish is ready to serve to preserve the flavour.

They are rich in vitamin C and minerals. Infused in tea, they may stimulate digestion and ease catarrh.



Cow Parsley

Anthriscus sylvestris



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Biennial to 1m tall, with upright hollow stems. Leaves are 2–3-times pinnately divided. Flowers are white, and clustered in flattened umbels. Also called Wild Chervil.

DISTRIBUTION Common in northern and central Europe.

USES Young leaves have a mild aromatic taste with a hint of aniseed, and can be added to salads or used as a flavouring. Can be confused with similar-looking poisonous plants such as Hemlock.

Coriander

Coriandrum sativum



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Annual with solid ridged stems to 70cm tall. Leaves are 1–3-times pinnate. Fruits are red-brown and hard, the two halves not separating easily.

DISTRIBUTION Native to North Africa and south-west Asia, and widespread elsewhere as both a crop and naturalized.

USES An ancient herb known from about 1500BC. Fresh lower leaves are used as a garnish and in curries. Ripe seeds are an ingredient of many dishes, both sweet and savoury, and of the spice mixture garam masala. Known as an appetite stimulant and aid to digestion.

Anise

Pimpinella anisum



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

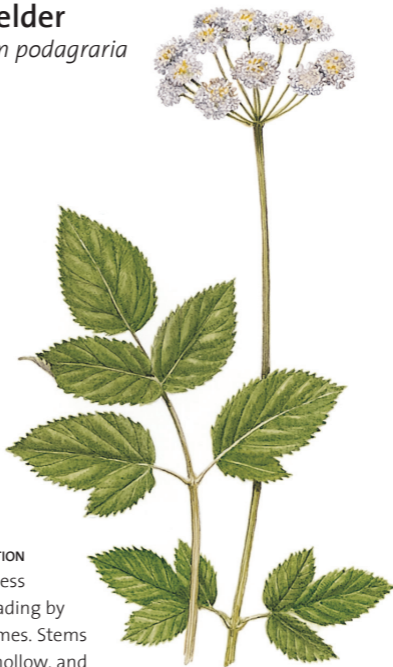
Strongly aromatic annual to 50cm tall. Lowest leaves are kidney-shaped, middle leaves pinnate with broad lobes, upper leaves 2–3-times pinnate with narrow lobes. Flowers are white, and are followed by ovoid or oblong, finely ridged fruits.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia, and widely cultivated.

USES Distinctively liquorice-flavoured seeds are added to dishes such as curries, soups, cakes and pastries, and pickles. They make a relaxing tea that may relieve tight coughs. Used in drinks such as French pastis and Turkish raki, and in toothpastes and cosmetics.

Ground-elder

Aegopodium podagraria



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Stout and hairless perennial spreading by creeping rhizomes. Stems are to 1m tall, hollow, and bear leaves divided into three leaflets, each divided into three. Flowers are white and borne in compact heads. Also called Goutweed.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Europe and Asia, and invasive in many places.

USES Young leafy shoots gathered just before flowering have a pleasant sharp flavour, and may be used in soups and salads, or cooked like spinach. Used traditionally for arthritis, rheumatism and gout. An infusion or poultice can be made from the leaves.

Dill

Anethum graveolens

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Slightly bluish, strongly smelling annual to 50cm tall, similar to Fennel (opposite), with much-divided feathery leaves and yellow flowers. Fruits are bordered with a pale wing. Also called Anet, Dill-oil Plant and Sabbath Day Posy.

DISTRIBUTION Probably native to south-west Asia, and widely cultivated and naturalized in many temperate regions.

USES An ancient culinary herb.

Leaves are added to fish dishes, soups, stews and cream sauces.

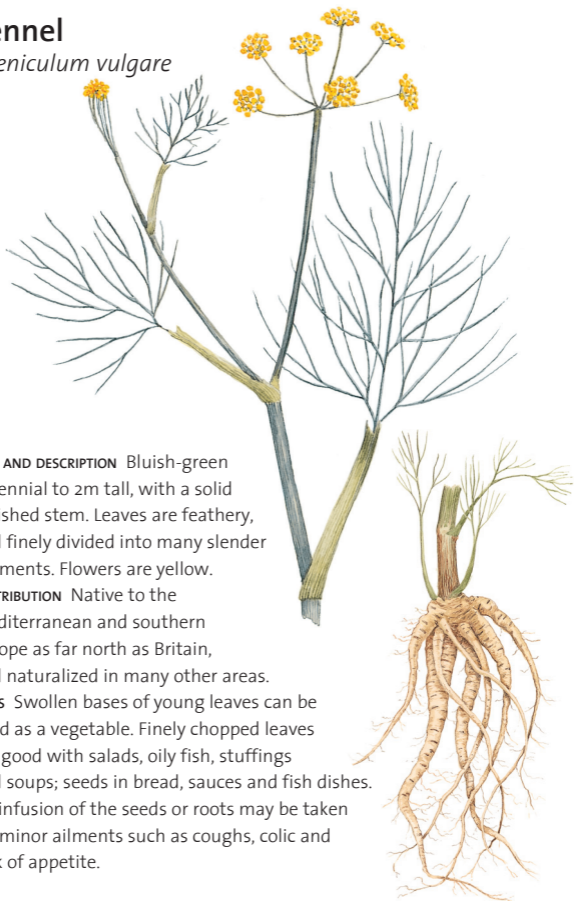
Stronger tasting aromatic seeds are used to spice pickles, vinegar and vegetables.

Oil of dill is a mild sedative, and dill water, made by infusing bruised seeds, is said to improve the appetite and digestion, and to ease colic.



Fennel

Foeniculum vulgare



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Bluish-green perennial to 2m tall, with a solid polished stem. Leaves are feathery, and finely divided into many slender segments. Flowers are yellow.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the Mediterranean and southern Europe as far north as Britain, and naturalized in many other areas.

USES Swollen bases of young leaves can be used as a vegetable. Finely chopped leaves are good with salads, oily fish, stuffings and soups; seeds in bread, sauces and fish dishes. An infusion of the seeds or roots may be taken for minor ailments such as coughs, colic and lack of appetite.

Cumin

Cuminum cyminum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Slender annual to 50cm tall. Leaves are divided into thread-like lobes. Flowers are white or pink, and there are 3–5 in each of the simple small umbels that form the compound umbel. Fruits are to 5mm long and finely ridged.

DISTRIBUTION Native to North Africa and south-west Asia, and widely cultivated elsewhere.

USES Whole or ground seeds are used in Asian and North African cuisines, and often added to spice mixtures. Can be used in curries, and with chicken, lamb and beef dishes, soups and preserved meats. Closely related to Caraway (page 91) and similarly used for digestive complaints.



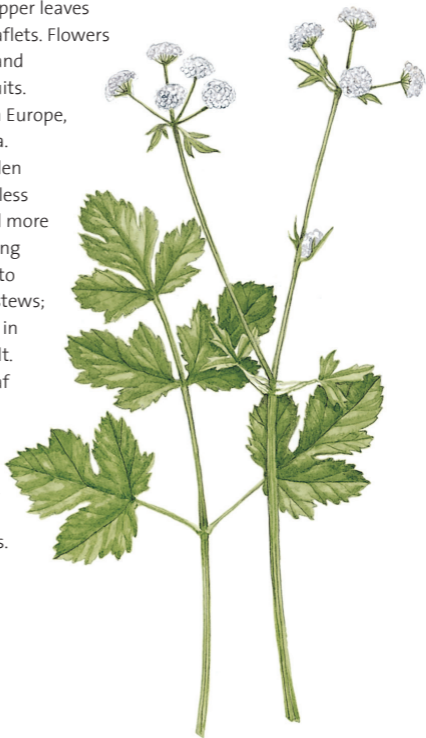
Wild Celery

Apium graveolens

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Biennial to 1m tall. Lower leaves are pinnate, upper leaves divided into three leaflets. Flowers are greenish-white, and followed by ovoid fruits.

DISTRIBUTION Found in Europe, Asia and North Africa.

USES Cultivated Garden Celery (*A. g. dulce*) is less pungent in taste and more commonly used. Young leaves can be added to salads, the seeds to stews; seeds are often used in the form of celery salt. Swollen blanched leaf stalks of the garden form are the well-known vegetable. Said to help arthritis, gout, fluid retention and fungal infections.



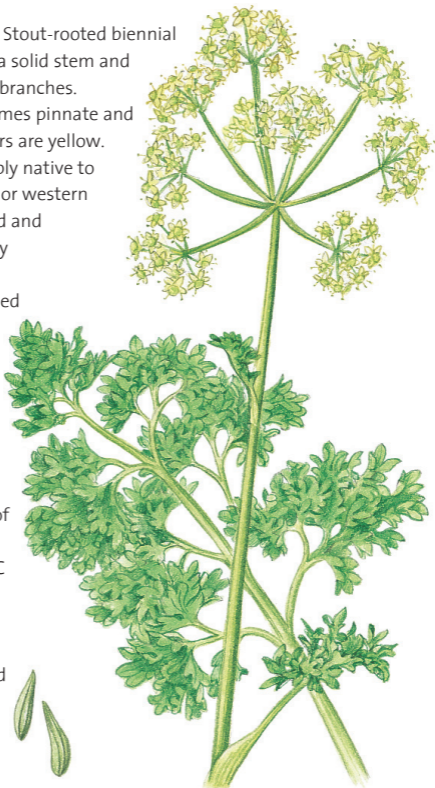
Garden Parsley

Petroselinum crispum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Stout-rooted biennial to 40cm tall, with a solid stem and sharply ascending branches. Leaves are three-times pinnate and shiny green. Flowers are yellow.

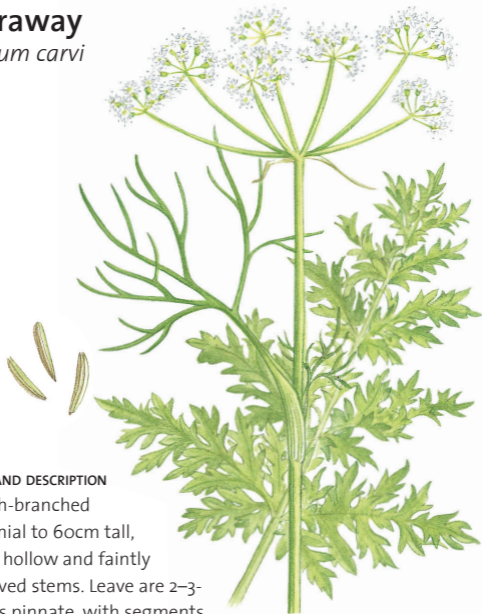
DISTRIBUTION Probably native to south-east Europe or western Asia, and cultivated and naturalized in every temperate region.

USES Curly and frilled leaves of some cultivated forms are a popular culinary garnish. They are also a breath freshener recommended against the smell of garlic, and a good source of vitamin C and iron. Said to help urinary disorders and fluid retention, and used to dress insect bites and wounds.



Caraway

Carum carvi



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Much-branched biennial to 60cm tall, with hollow and faintly grooved stems. Leaves are 2–3-times pinnate, with segments divided into narrow lobes. Flowers are white or pink. Fruits are ellipsoid and ridged.

DISTRIBUTION Found in temperate regions of the Old World; introduced in many areas.

USES An ancient herb cultivated on a large scale today. Used as a flavouring ingredient, the seeds are also a good appetite stimulant; they are widely used in cooking. Leaves have a flavour similar to that of Dill (page 86) and may be used in salads; the roots can be cooked as a vegetable. Used in proprietary medicines for digestive disorders.

Garden Angelica

Angelica archangelica

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Hardy biennial to 3m tall, with stout and ridged, hollow green stems.

Flowers are greenish.

Fruits have broad corky wings. Also called Angel's Fishing Rod and Ground Ash.

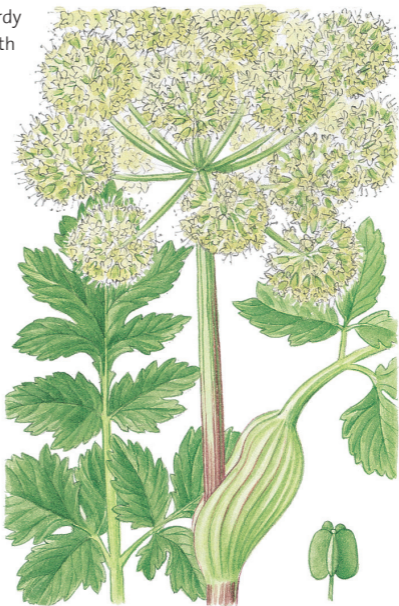
DISTRIBUTION Throughout northern Europe and Greenland to Central Asia.

USES Best known for the candied stems of confectionery.

High sugar content.

Fresh leaves are added to soups, fish and stewed fruits, the seeds used as a flavouring for liqueurs such as

Chartreuse and Benedictine. A tea from the seeds or dried roots is said to help anaemia, colds, asthma and other bronchial conditions. Used as a digestive tonic in herbal medicine. The herb should not be taken in larger than culinary amounts – very large doses can stimulate, then paralyse the nervous system.



Lovage

Levisticum officinale

SIZE AND DISTRIBUTION Stout and strong-smelling perennial to 2.5m tall. Leaves are 2–3-times pinnate, the lobes deeply and irregularly toothed. Flowers are greenish-yellow. Fruits are to 7mm long, ridged and winged. Also called Bladderseed.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Iran, and cultivated and naturalized in other regions of the world.

USES Strong flavour reminiscent of celery. Young leaves and seeds may be added to many dishes, including vegetarian ones, seeds to breads and other savouries. Also employed in herb liqueurs. Used for digestive complaints and to reduce water retention.



Scots Lovage

Ligusticum scoticum



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 80cm tall, with thick stems. Leaves are large, 2–3-times pinnate, with diamond-shaped lobes and toothed margins. Flowers are yellow, and borne in dense compound umbels. Much smaller than Lovage (page 93).

DISTRIBUTION Locally common in coastal Scotland, Northern Ireland and northern Europe, growing near the sea and on sea cliffs.

USES Leaves have a strong celery aroma. They are good for reinforcing the flavour of vegetable soups, and may be wrapped around red meat joints for roasting. They were once eaten in Scotland to prevent scurvy.

Alexanders

Smyrniium olusatrum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Strong-smelling biennial to 1.25m tall. Leaves are dark green, shiny and divided into three, each segment with three lobes and a toothed margin. Flowers are yellow, with up to 15 simple umbels forming a compound umbel.

DISTRIBUTION Naturalized and common on the coasts of southern Britain and other parts of Europe.

USES Should be picked before the flowers open. Stems can be boiled or steamed for a few minutes; the aniseed smell disappears with cooking, and they can be eaten like asparagus. Young leaves are good in salads, or chopped into a sauce made with butter, flour and milk.



Asafoetida

Ferula assa-foetida

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Foul-smelling yellowish perennial to 2m tall, with stout grooved stems and thick roots. Leaves are to 35cm long, and deeply 2–4-times divided. Flowers are pale greenish-yellow and produced in large and flat compound umbels; flower spikes can reach 4m in height. Flowers are followed by fruits 1.2cm long. Roots are thick and pulpy. Also called Devil's Dung, Stinking Gum, Hing, Food of the Gods and Giant Fennel.



DISTRIBUTION Native to Iran; also cultivated in India and Afghanistan.

USES Asafoetida is a waxy gum resin derived from the root and stem of this and two similar species. As a condiment, mainly used in Persian, Afghan and Indian cuisines, especially in vegetarian dishes. Plant smells strongly due to the presence of sulphur compounds, but the smell disappears after cooking. Used for digestive complaints and lowering blood pressure, and in veterinary medicine.

Pignut

Conopodium majus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Almost hairless perennial to 25cm tall, with slender stems and finely divided upper leaves.

Flowers are white, with 6–12 simple umbels arranged in a compound umbel. Root tuber is dark brown and irregular.

DISTRIBUTION Common in western Europe eastwards to Italy.

USES Dark brown, irregular root tuber has a taste reminiscent of hazelnuts, and can be peeled, washed and eaten raw. Powdered roots have been said to make a good cough remedy.

Wintergreen

Gaultheria procumbens



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Creeping evergreen shrub to 15cm tall. Leaves are thick, leathery and shiny-dark. Flowers are white, waxy, drooping and bell-shaped. Berries are globose and bright red, and they persist throughout winter. Also called Boxberry, Squaw Plum and Drunkards.



DISTRIBUTION Native to northern and eastern North America.

USES Fragrant leaves contain methyl salicylate, which is similar to aspirin and may be useful for combatting rheumatism. It is extracted as an oil; the oil content of frosted leaves, which turn purple, is thought to be higher than that of unfrosted leaves. The natural oil has now been largely replaced by synthetic compounds.

Bilberry

Vaccinium myrtillus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Small, much-branched evergreen shrub with green twigs. Leaves are bright green and oval, with slightly toothed margins. Flowers are globose, with fused greenish-pink petals. Fruits are globose blue-black berries. Also called Blaeberry and Whortleberry.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs throughout temperate and subarctic regions of the world.

USES Very sweet and with a high vitamin C content, the fruits can be eaten raw and, where abundant enough, used in pies, preserves, jellies, fruit stews and wine. Reputed to improve night vision and help eye disorders such as macular degeneration.

Cranberry

Vaccinium oxycoccos



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Small, spreading evergreen shrub to 12cm tall, with dark green leaves. Flowers have a pinkish-red corolla deeply divided into four lobes. Fruits are globose red berries. Also called Crone Berry, Fen Grapes and Moorberries.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs in cooler parts of the northern hemisphere.

USES Fruits are very acidic and almost inedible raw, but where they are abundant they can be used to make jams, jellies and fruit stews. Used to help prevent cystitis and recurrent urinary infections.

Great Yellow Gentian

Gentiana lutea

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Stout and erect perennial to 1.2m tall. Leaves are opposite, large, ribbed and clasping; those towards the stem form a rosette. Flowers are yellow with 5–9 corolla lobes. Also called Feldwode and Yellow-flowered Gentian.

DISTRIBUTION Confined to the mountains of central and southern Europe, where it grows in grassy subalpine and alpine pastures.

USES All gentians contain very bitter principles, which in this species are obtained from the dried roots. Once regarded as something of a universal panacea, the bitters may aid a variety of digestive ailments. Should not be taken in pregnancy or if suffering from high blood pressure.



Common Jasmine

Jasminum officinale

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Deciduous or semi-evergreen woody climber to 10m tall. Leaves are opposite, pinnate, and have 5–7 leaflets. Flowers are usually white, but may sometimes be flushed purple; they are fragrant and tubular. Also called Jessamine, Poet's Jasmine and Summer Jasmine.

DISTRIBUTION Native to south-west Asia. Introduced to Europe in the 16th century, and now extensively grown in different areas of the world, including as an

ornamental garden plant in Britain, where it is valued for its scent.

USES Jasmine oil is an expensive, powerful fragrance obtained from the flowers. It has a rich, warm floral scent and is used by perfumers, as well as by aromatherapists for depression and as a relaxant. Jasmine tea is a mild sedative and may ease headaches. Essential oil should not be taken internally; berries are poisonous.



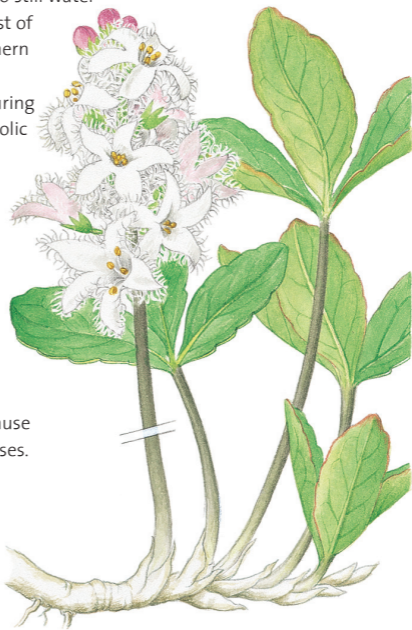
Bogbean

Menyanthes trifoliata

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Aquatic plant 12–35cm tall. Leaves are divided into groups of three leaflets and held above the water's surface. Flowers are pink and white with fringed petals, and borne in spikes. Also called Bitterwort, Bog Hop and Water Trefoil.

DISTRIBUTION Native to still water and bogs across most of the temperate northern hemisphere.

USES Used for flavouring ales and other alcoholic drinks. Traditional tonic and purging herb, the leaves and rhizome containing bitter compounds similar to those in gentians (page 101). Recommended for various complaints, stimulating the appetite, but may cause vomiting in large doses.



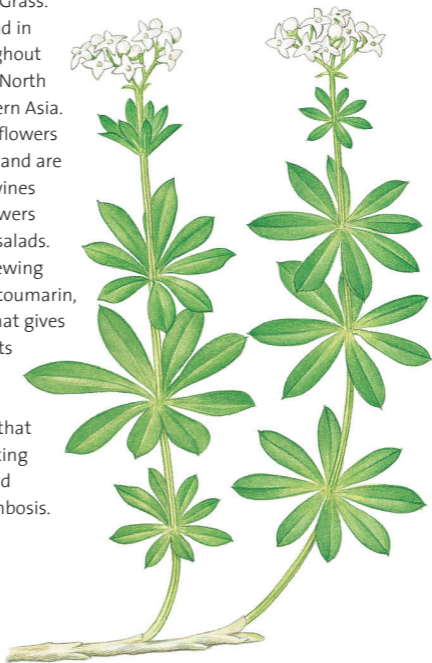
Woodruff

Galium odoratum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Slender fragrant perennial to 25cm tall, with creeping rhizomes and erect stems. Leaves usually 6–9 in each whorl, their margins with tiny, forwards-pointing teeth. Flowers are white and fragrant, forming dense clusters. Also called Hay Plant, Kiss-me-quick and Sweet Grass.

DISTRIBUTION Found in woodland throughout much of Europe, North Africa and northern Asia.

USES Leaves and flowers make a good tea and are used to flavour wines for May cups; flowers can be added to salads. A traditional strewing herb containing coumarin, the compound that gives new-mown hay its distinctive scent. It is contained in some medicines that are used for treating haemorrhoids and preventing thrombosis.



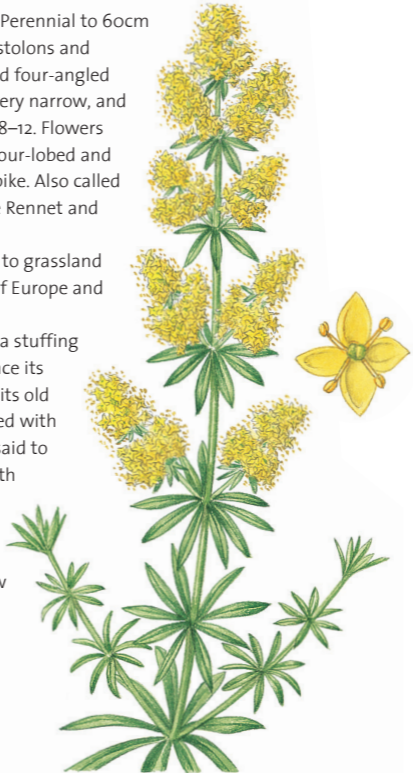
Lady's Bedstraw

Galium verum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 60cm tall, with creeping stolons and much-branched and four-angled stems. Leaves are very narrow, and borne in whorls of 8–12. Flowers are bright yellow, four-lobed and form a branched spike. Also called Bed Flower, Cheese Rennet and Maid's Hair.

DISTRIBUTION Native to grassland throughout most of Europe and western Asia.

USES Once used as a stuffing for mattresses, hence its name, but most of its old uses were connected with curdling milk. It is said to be less effective with modern milk, though it can still be used to impart a rich yellow colour to cheese.



Cleavers

Galium aparine

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Rough and minutely prickly annual that scrambles through surrounding vegetation. Stems reach 1.5m and are four-angled, with 6–9 leaves in each whorl. Flowers are tiny, whitish and four-lobed. Fruits are burr-like, and consist of two fused globes covered with hooked bristles. Also called Goose Grass, Bur Weed, Scratch Weed and Stick-a-back.

DISTRIBUTION Native across Europe, and northern and western Asia.

USES An infusion from the dried aerial parts may be used as a diuretic for cleansing the lymphatic system and reducing swollen glands. It may also help against eczema, psoriasis, sores and wounds, and dandruff.



Yellow-bark

Cinchona calisaya

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Evergreen tree to 12m tall. Leaves are oval to oblong. Flowers are small, fragrant, pink, white or red, and borne in terminal clusters. Fruit is a small capsule containing many seeds.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the eastern Andes in South America, and introduced to Asia, where it is grown on plantations. Also called Peruvian Bark, Crown Bark and Fever Tree.

USES The flavouring used in tonic water. Bark contains a large number of alkaloids, particularly quinine, which is used for fevers and heart problems, and is the most effective treatment for malaria. It can be toxic, and as a drug should only be used under medical supervision.



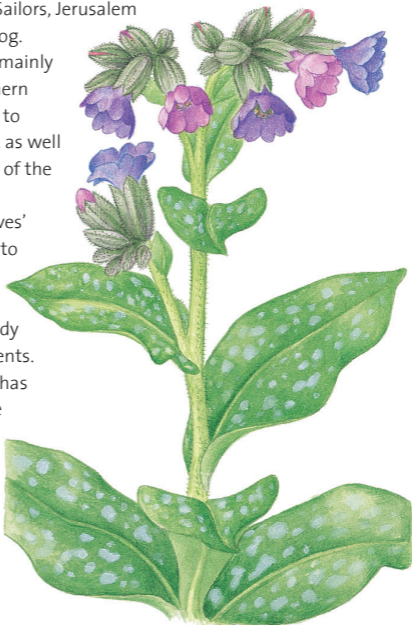
Lungwort

Pulmonaria officinalis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Hairy perennial to 30cm tall, with clumps of white-spotted, unstalked and clasping stem leaves and spoon-shaped basal leaves. Flowers are pink and blue, funnel-shaped and carried in terminal clusters on leafy stems. Also called Bedlam Cowslip, Mary's Tears, Soldiers and Sailors, Jerusalem Sage and Spotted Dog.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs mainly in central and southern Europe, northwards to Britain and Sweden, as well as in northern parts of the United States.

USES Due to the leaves' supposed similarity to lungs, an infusion of leaves was in the past used as a remedy for pulmonary ailments. This traditional use has been confirmed, the leaves containing soothing mucilage and silica that may restore elasticity to the lungs.



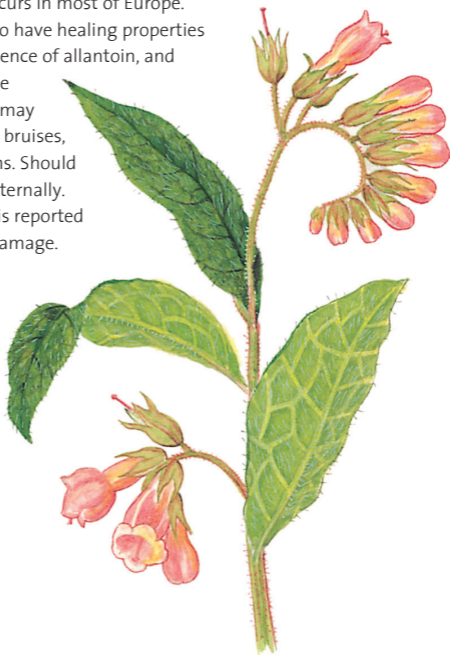
Common Comfrey

Symphytum officinale

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Erect bristly perennial to 1.2m tall. Basal leaves are oval and hairy; stem leaves are shorter and often clasp the stem. Flowers are purple-violet, pinkish or white, tubular to bell-shaped, and carried in curved sprays. Also called Bruisewort and Bone-set.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs in most of Europe.

USES Reputed to have healing properties due to the presence of allantoin, and a poultice of the leaves or roots may be effective for bruises, ulcers and burns. Should not be taken internally. Prolonged use is reported to cause liver damage.



Borage

Borago officinalis



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

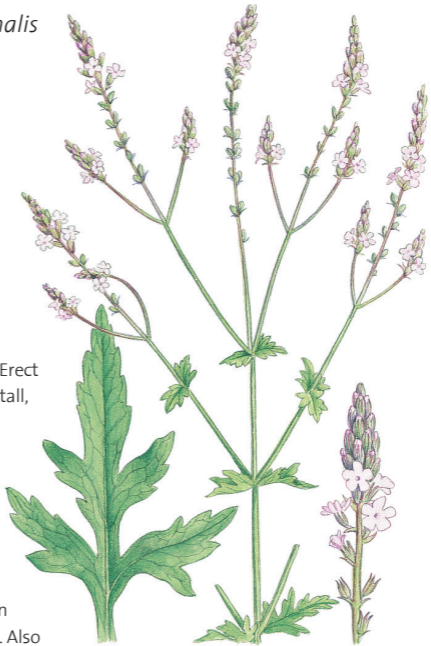
Erect bristly annual to 60cm tall. Basal leaves are stalked; upper leaves are stalkless and clasp the stem. Flowers are blue, with five spreading, pointed corolla lobes; black stamens form a central cone. Also called Cool Tankard and Talewort.

DISTRIBUTION Native to southern Europe, and widely cultivated and naturalized elsewhere.

USES Young leaves taste of cucumber and can be added to salads and drinks. Flowers make a good garnish for salads, and sweet and savoury dishes. They may also be crystallized for cake decoration. The herb has a long history of medicinal use, including as a tea for easing coughs and depression.

Vervain

Verbena officinalis



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Erect perennial to 60cm tall, with tough and slender, F-angled stems. Leaves are opposite and pinnately lobed. Flowers are pale pink, slightly two-lipped and borne on long slender spikes. Also called Enchanter's Plant, Herb Grace, Herb of the Cross, Juno's Tears and Tears of Isis.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs from Europe and North Africa to the Himalayas.

USES Long tradition of magical and medicinal use. Tea made from the aerial parts is said to help nervous exhaustion, headaches and migraine. Also thought to be effective against liver and gall-bladder disorders. Should not be taken during pregnancy.

Lemon Verbena

Aloysia citrodora



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Deciduous shrub to 8m tall in the tropics, but much smaller in cooler regions. Leaves are narrow, yellowish-green and borne in whorls of three. Flowers are pale lavender, two-lipped and grouped in slender terminal spikes.

DISTRIBUTION Native to South America, and widely cultivated in the Mediterranean and other parts of the Old World.

USES Used sparingly, the fresh young leaves impart a lemon flavour to fruit dishes, apple jelly, stuffings and poultry. Essential oil extracted from the plant is used in perfumes and liqueurs. Aerial parts are strongly lemon-scented when crushed, and used as a tea to improve digestion. Said to counter insomnia, depression and lethargy.

Sweet Basil

Ocimum basilicum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial or, in cool regions, an annual to 50cm tall. Opposite leaves are hairless and slightly fleshy. Flowers are white or mauve-tinged, two-lipped and borne in whorls, forming a loose spike. Many varieties, including purple-leaved forms.

DISTRIBUTION Native to tropical Asia, and cultivated in many parts of the world.

USES Fresh leaves are the main ingredient in pesto sauce and can be used in many other dishes; they are particularly complimentary to preparations based on tomatoes. Grown indoors, Basil may act as an insect repellent. One of more than 60 basil species with a variety of fragrances, including lime, lemon, cinnamon, thyme, anise and sweet camphor.



Virginian Skullcap

Scutellaria lateriflora

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

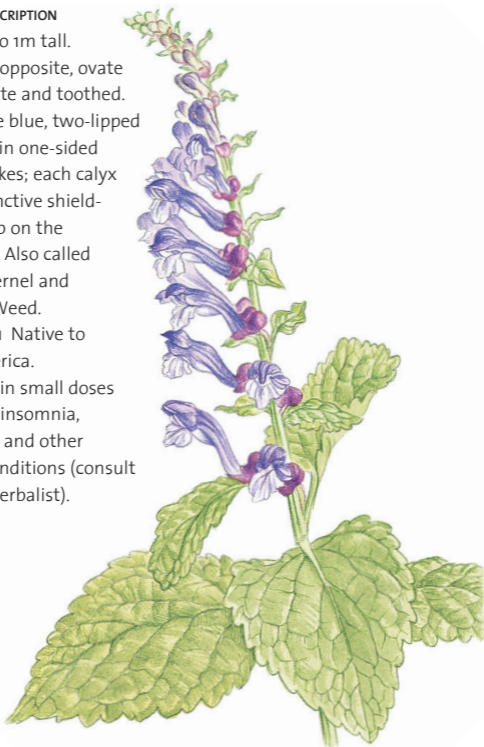
Perennial to 1m tall.

Leaves are opposite, ovate to lanceolate and toothed.

Flowers are blue, two-lipped and borne in one-sided axillary spikes; each calyx has a distinctive shield-shaped flap on the upper side. Also called Blue Pimpernel and Mad Dog Weed.

DISTRIBUTION Native to North America.

USES Used in small doses to counter insomnia, depression and other nervous conditions (consult a trained herbalist).



White Horehound

Marrubium vulgare

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

White-felted perennial to 60cm tall. Wrinkled leaves are opposite and rounded. Flowers are white with a deeply bifid upper lip and a calyx tube with ten tiny hooked teeth at the rim.

DISTRIBUTION

Native across Europe and North Africa, as far as central Asia.

USES Used as a cough remedy since ancient times. Has also been used for heart, liver and digestive problems, and as a quinine substitute for malaria, but now mainly

employed for respiratory conditions. Horehound candy is sold as cough sweets. Aerial parts yield bitter principles and a volatile oil, and can be taken as a hot or cold infusion, or as a syrup. Should not be used during pregnancy.



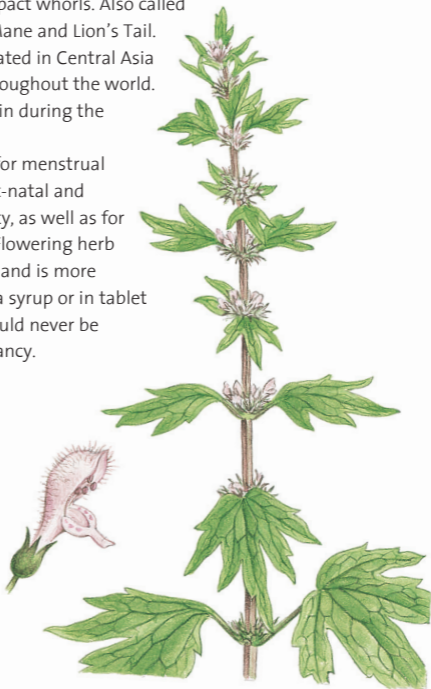
Motherwort

Leonurus cardiaca

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Strong-smelling perennial to 1.2m tall. Leaves are opposite, and cut into 3–7 toothed lobes that radiate from the leaf base. Flowers are white or pale pink with densely hairy upper lips, and carried in compact whorls. Also called Cow Wort, Lion's Mane and Lion's Tail.

DISTRIBUTION Originated in Central Asia and now found throughout the world. Introduced to Britain during the Middle Ages.

USES Used mainly for menstrual problems, and post-natal and menopausal anxiety, as well as for heart complaints. Flowering herb makes a bitter tea, and is more normally taken as a syrup or in tablet form. The herb should never be used during pregnancy.



Lemon Balm

Melissa officinalis



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 70cm tall. Leaves are opposite, and smell strongly of lemon when bruised. Flowers are pale yellow, white or pinkish, and two-lipped. Also called Balm.

DISTRIBUTION Native to southern Europe, North Africa and western Asia, and widely cultivated elsewhere.

USES Fresh leaves are used to flavour drinks, cheeses, jellies, jams and preserves. The herb has a long history of use as a cordial and tea, particularly as a sedative and digestive aid, and for treating nervous conditions and viral infections.

Betony

Stachys officinalis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 50cm tall, with sparsely leafy stems and a well-developed basal rosette of long-stalked, oblong leaves. Flower whorls are crowded onto spikes; corollas are bright reddish-purple and two-lipped, the upper one flat.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Europe.

USES An ancient herb long held in high regard for its allegedly protective and curative powers, but it has fallen into disuse. Traditionally used as a poultice of fresh leaves to clean wounds; dried leaves were used to provoke violent sneezing to clear head colds. Today used mainly in herbal smoking mixtures.



Hyssop

Hyssopus officinalis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Aromatic perennial or miniature shrub to 60cm tall, with stems that are woody at the bases. Leaves are narrow and opposite. Loose whorls of two-lipped blue or violet flowers are carried on slender spikes at the stem tips.

DISTRIBUTION Native to southern Europe, North Africa and western Asia, and cultivated elsewhere.

USES Flowers can be used in salads. Volatile found in the herb contains the bitter principle (marrubin) that is also present in White Horehound (page 115); medicinally, the plants are used in similar ways. Should not be used during pregnancy.



Summer Savory

Satureja hortensis



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Annual to 25cm tall. Leaves are narrow and opposite. Flowers are white, pink or lilac, and carried in few-flowered whorls. Both the calyx and corolla are two-lipped, the calyx with the lower teeth slightly longer than the upper. Also called Satyricon and Stone Basil.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the Mediterranean, and widely cultivated.

USES A culinary herb with a strong, hot and peppery taste, used with vegetable, bean and meat dishes. Said to ease the pain of bee stings if rubbed on them, and taken in tea form as an appetite stimulant and digestive aid.

Common Sage

Salvia officinalis



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Aromatic greyish shrub to 60cm tall, with woolly branches. Leaves are opposite, and wrinkled above and densely hairy beneath. Flowers are violet-blue, pink or white, and two-lipped.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the eastern and western Mediterranean, and widely cultivated in other parts of the world.

USES Improves the keeping quality of meat and processed foods, and leaves are added to various sausages, pickles, cheeses and honey. Medicinally, it is less used than it once was, but is still regarded as effective for colds, and mouth and throat infections. Essential oil is used to flavour wines and liqueurs, and in perfumed products. Essential oil or dried herb can be used as a moth repellent.

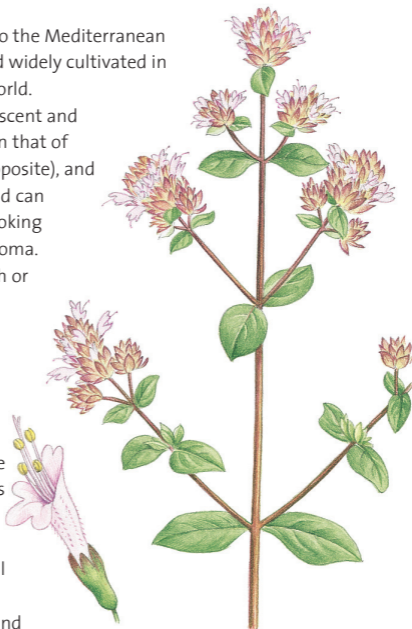
Oregano

Origanum vulgare

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Often purple-tinged, rather woody and aromatic perennial to 90cm tall. Leaves are opposite and stalked. Flowers are white or purplish-pink, two-lipped and carried in small spikes crowded into terminal flat-topped clusters. Also called Wild Marjoram.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the Mediterranean and Middle East, and widely cultivated in other parts of the world.

USES More pungent scent and stronger flavour than that of Sweet Marjoram (opposite), and thus more robust and can withstand longer cooking without losing its aroma. Leaves are used fresh or dried, particularly in Italian and Mediterranean cuisines, and in various meat products such as sausages. Aids the digestion and acts as an antiseptic; also used for bronchial complaints. Essential oil is used in some liqueurs, perfumes and cosmetics.



Sweet Marjoram

Origanum majorana

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Similar to its close relative, Oregano (opposite), but generally smaller in all its parts, reaching a height of 30cm, with more or less stalkless leaves. Flowers have a one-lipped calyx that is deeply slit on one side. Also called Knot Marjoram and Pot Marjoram.

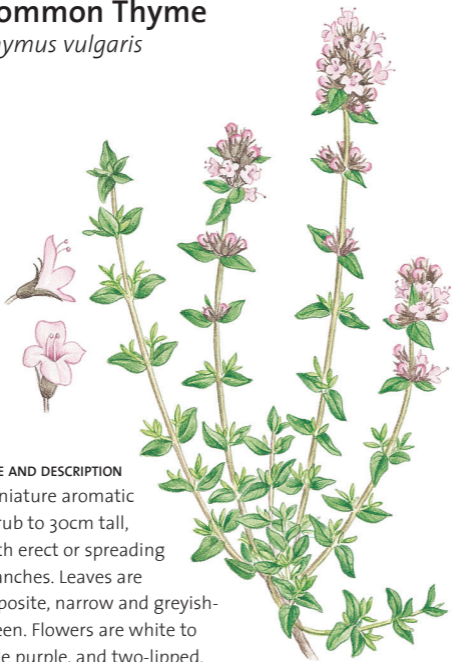
DISTRIBUTION Native to North Africa and south-west Asia, cultivated in other regions and naturalized in southern Europe.

USES Introduced to Europe in the 16th century, when it was used in nosegays to ward off the plague and other diseases. More delicately flavoured and sweetly scented than Oregano. Fresh or dried leaves are used in lightly cooked dishes with vegetables, eggs or cream. Tea may help to ease colds and aid the digestion. Essential oil is used in perfumes and cosmetics.



Common Thyme

Thymus vulgaris



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Miniature aromatic shrub to 30cm tall, with erect or spreading branches. Leaves are opposite, narrow and greyish-green. Flowers are white to pale purple, and two-lipped.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the western Mediterranean, and cultivated elsewhere.

USES Widespread and popular culinary flavouring. Fresh or dried leaves can be added to almost any savoury dish. Strong antiseptic properties. Thyme oil is used in mouthwashes and cough medicines, and in some cosmetics and toothpastes. Oil can be toxic if taken internally, and should not be used during pregnancy.

Wild Thyme

Thymus serpyllum



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Mat-forming perennial to 5cm tall. Leaves are opposite and small. Flowers are purple, two-lipped and grow in dense terminal clusters. Also called Creeping Thyme and Mother of Thyme.

DISTRIBUTION Common in Europe in dry grassland, heaths, dunes and screes from southern Sweden southwards.

USES Excellent aromatic herb that can be used in savoury dishes and poultry stuffings.

Spear Mint

Mentha spicata



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Strongly aromatic perennial to 90cm tall.

Leaves are narrow-ovate, toothed and almost unstalked. Flowers are lavender, and carried in tall and slender spikes.

DISTRIBUTION Earliest native origins unknown, but found across Europe and south-west Asia. Grows in damp ground in meadows and on verges; popular as a garden plant.

USES The most popular cultivated culinary mint, good for mint sauce, jelly, julep and vinegar, and with yoghurt-based dishes, potatoes and salads. Often used in herb-tea blends.

Water Mint

Mentha aquatica



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Strongly scented perennial to 50cm tall, with creeping underground stems. Leaves are greenish- purple, opposite, toothed and oval. Small lilac flowers are densely crowded into terminal heads to 2cm across, with additional clusters sometimes in the axils of the upper leaves. One of at least ten other European species of wild mint, with various flavours.

DISTRIBUTION Widely distributed in Europe's swamps, fens, marshes and wet woods, and banks of streams, rivers and lakes; rarer in the north.

USES Slightly bitter taste, but can be used like garden mint in sauces, chutneys, cold drinks and tea.

Pennyroyal

Mentha pulegium



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Creeping, often mat-forming perennial to 40cm tall. Leaves are opposite, and smell like peppermint. Flowers are small, lilac and carried in dense whorls in the upper leaf axils.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs in much of Europe and North Africa.

USES Strongly flavoured leaves may be used sparsely in stews and stuffings. Hot infusion may aid coughs and asthmatic problems. Fresh leaves act as an insect repellent and alleviate bites if rubbed onto skin. Essential oil can be toxic and should never be taken without advice from a qualified medical professional.

Red Bergamot

Monarda didyma

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Aromatic perennial to 1.5m tall, with square stems and opposite leaves. Flowers are bright red, tubular, two-lipped, 2–3cm long and crowded together in showy and dense terminal clusters.

Name of the plant derives from the attractive scent of its foliage, which resembles that of the Bergamot Orange (*Citrus bergamia*). Also called Oswego Tea and Bee Balm.

DISTRIBUTION Native to North America, and now grown in Europe, including as a garden ornamental.

USES Leaves make the drink Oswego

tea, named after the Oswego Indians of North America, who were the first to use it. Flower petals make good decorations for salads. Leaves can be used in wine cups and lemonade, or chopped and added sparingly to salads, stuffings and jams. Therapeutically, leaves have been used for digestive complaints and colds, as well as to reduce fevers.



Common Lavender

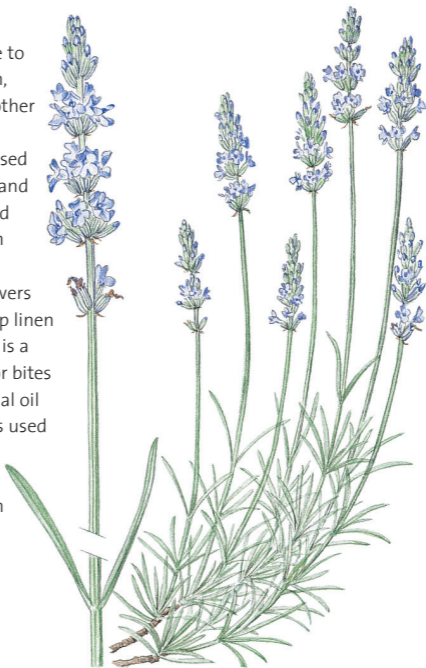
Lavandula angustifolia

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Much-branched aromatic evergreen shrub to 1m tall. Leaves are opposite, narrow and initially white-hairy, later turning green. Flowers are lavender-blue or purplish, two-lipped and borne

on dense spikes.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the Mediterranean, and cultivated in other parts of the world.

USES Sometimes used to flavour sorbets and biscuits. Leaves and flowers are used in herbal teas and tobacco. Dried flowers placed in bags keep linen fresh. Lavender oil is a first-aid remedy for bites and stings. Essential oil from the flowers is used in aromatherapy for infections and stress, as well as in perfumes and cosmetics.



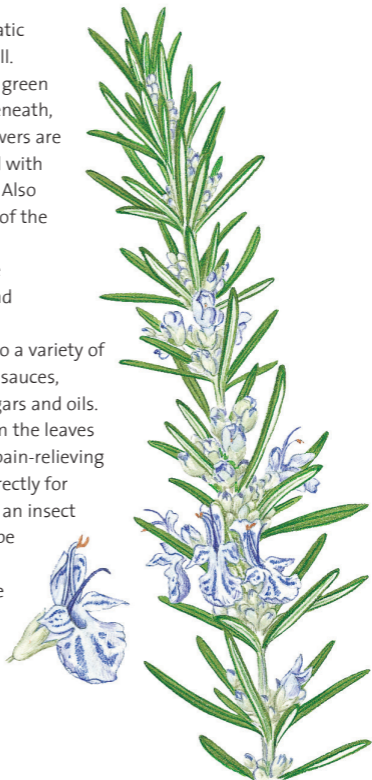
Rosemary

Rosmarinus officinalis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Aromatic evergreen shrub to 2m tall. Leaves are opposite, dark green above and white-hairy beneath, narrow and leathery. Flowers are pale blue, and two-lipped with two protruding stamens. Also called Old Man and Rose of the Sea.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the Mediterranean region, and cultivated elsewhere.

USES Leaves add flavour to a variety of meats, particularly lamb, sauces, baked fish, cordials, vinegars and oils. Essential oil, distilled from the leaves and flowers, is added to pain-relieving liniments, and applied directly for headaches and to skin as an insect repellent. Oil should not be used internally, and very large doses of the leaf are toxic.



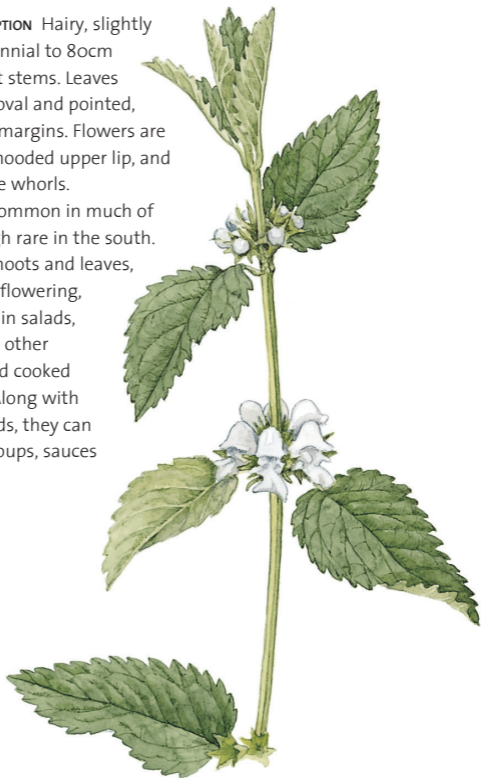
White Dead-nettle

Lamium album

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Hairy, slightly aromatic perennial to 80cm tall, with erect stems. Leaves are opposite, oval and pointed, with toothed margins. Flowers are white with a hooded upper lip, and borne in dense whorls.

DISTRIBUTION Common in much of Europe, though rare in the south.

USES Young shoots and leaves, picked before flowering, may be eaten in salads, or mixed with other vegetables and cooked like spinach. Along with the flower buds, they can be added to soups, sauces and stews.



Red Dead-nettle

Lamium purpureum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Soft and hairy, branching annual to 30cm tall, with purple-tinged stems and a pungent scent when bruised. Leaves are opposite, heart-shaped and carried on long stalks. Flowers are pinkish-purple, and borne in whorls near the top of each upright stem.

DISTRIBUTION Common in Europe except the far north.

USES Can be used in the same way as White Dead-nettle (opposite), and the flowers may be crystallized.



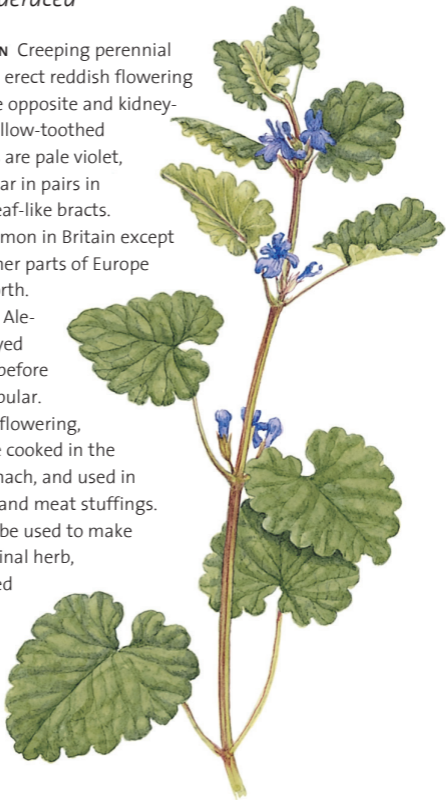
Ground-ivy

Glechoma hederacea

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Creeping perennial to 15cm tall, with erect reddish flowering stems. Leaves are opposite and kidney-shaped, with shallow-toothed margins. Flowers are pale violet, and usually appear in pairs in the axils of the leaf-like bracts.

DISTRIBUTION Common in Britain except Scotland, and other parts of Europe except the far north.

USES Once called Ale-hoof, and employed for making beer before hops became popular. Collected before flowering, the leaves can be cooked in the same way as spinach, and used in vegetable soups and meat stuffings. Dried leaves can be used to make a tea. As a medicinal herb, Ground-ivy is used mainly in the relief of catarrh and associated conditions like sinusitis.



Deadly Nightshade

Atropa belladonna

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Shrubby-looking perennial to 1.5m tall. Leaves are to 20cm long and ovate. Flowers are violet-brown to greenish, bell-shaped and drooping. Fruits are to 2cm in diameter, and glossy-black when ripe. Also called Banewort, Devil's Berries and Great Morel.

DISTRIBUTION Woodland plant native to Europe, North Africa and parts of Asia; naturalized in North America.

USES Widely used in proprietary medicines. All parts contain the narcotic alkaloid atropine, which is used as a sedative and antispasmodic for paralysing parts of the nervous system. In ophthalmology, used to dilate the pupils in eye-drops; formerly used cosmetically by women in this way (hence *belladonna*, from the Italian for beautiful woman), with prolonged use leading to blindness. The plant is highly poisonous and should never be used without medical supervision.



Sweet Pepper

Capsicum annuum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Annual to 90cm tall, with bright green leaves. Flowers are white and drooping, with a loose cone of bluish-yellow stamens.

Fruits are to 27cm long, firm and fleshy, and ripen from green to yellow or bright red.

There are hundreds of varieties of Sweet Pepper, which are divided into groups according to shape. Also called Bell Pepper.

DISTRIBUTION Native to tropical America, and cultivated in most warm and even temperate regions. In areas with cool summers, may be grown in greenhouses and conservatories.

USES Fruits are the well-known fresh 'vegetable', and when dried and ground the flesh of ripe red peppers yields paprika – Spain and Hungary are the world's largest producers. Paprika is available in many grades, from mild to hot, and can be used to flavour a variety of dishes.



Chilli Pepper

Capsicum frutescens

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Tall, woody-stemmed perennial to 2m tall. Leaves and flowers are similar to those of the closely related Sweet Pepper (opposite), but fruits are generally smaller, narrower and sometimes twisted, and yellow, orange or red.

DISTRIBUTION Native to South America, and extensively cultivated in the tropics.

USES Chilli is used to produce a variety of condiments. Cayenne powder is derived

from dried, very hot chillies. Piri piri, the African bird's-eye chilli, has been developed by the Portuguese into a sauce that also includes lemons, spices and herbs. Tabasco is a well-known hot chilli sauce invented in the United States in 1868. Medicinally, the plant has been used externally for muscle and nerve pain, and internally to stimulate the circulation and alleviate colds.



Thornapple

Datura stramonium

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Annual to 2m tall. Leaves are coarse and wavy-toothed. Flowers are white to creamy or pale violet, fragrant and trumpet-shaped, and rarely open completely. Small black seeds are contained in walnut-sized, four-chambered capsules. Also called Devil's Trumpet, Loco Weed, Stinkweed and Moonflower.

DISTRIBUTION Native to North America, and naturalized in many other warm and moderate parts of the world. Grows along roadsides, in dung heaps, on wasteland and in refuse dumps.

USES Related to Deadly Nightshade

(page 135) and Henbane.

Contains similar alkaloids, and is likewise a narcotic.

Used as a painkiller, and has been employed

as an anaesthetic

and for Parkinson's

disease. All parts of the plant are highly poisonous and should never

be eaten.



Mandrake

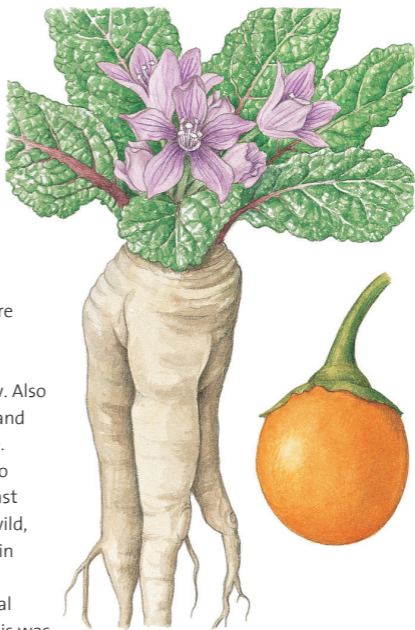
Mandragora officinarum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Rosette-forming perennial to 15cm tall, with a deeply forked taproot. Leaves are dark green and to 30cm long. Flowers are greenish-white, sometimes with purple staining, and bell-shaped. Fruits are globose, resembling tomatoes, and ripen from green to yellow. Also called Devil's Apple and Medicinal Mandrake.

DISTRIBUTION Native to central and south-east Europe; rare in the wild, although cultivated in some places.

USES With its unusual man-shaped root, this was one of the magical plants of ancient herbalists. A genuine medicinal herb, the root yields a strong anaesthetic that is still used in modern medicine. Like the related Deadly Nightshade (page 135), the plant is poisonous and should never be eaten.



Sesame

Sesamum orientale

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Erect annual to 60cm tall, with white, pink or mauve, trumpet-shaped flowers. Fruit is a 3cm-long capsule with many shiny ovoid seeds. Also called Halvah and Oil Plant.

DISTRIBUTION Native to tropical Asia, and widely cultivated and naturalized in other hot areas of the world.

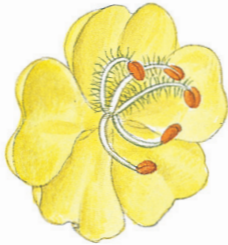
USES First domesticated in India in the second millennium BC, and grown primarily for its oil-rich seeds. These have a nutty flavour when cooked and are used as a garnish, or

ground and added to various dishes. They are often added to bread and biscuits, and are particularly popular in eastern Mediterranean cuisines, in which they are used to make preparations such as halva, tahini, hummus and various sweet confections. An oil is also expressed from the seeds. As a remedy, Sesame has been used for dental decay, premature hair loss and osteoporosis.



Great Mullein

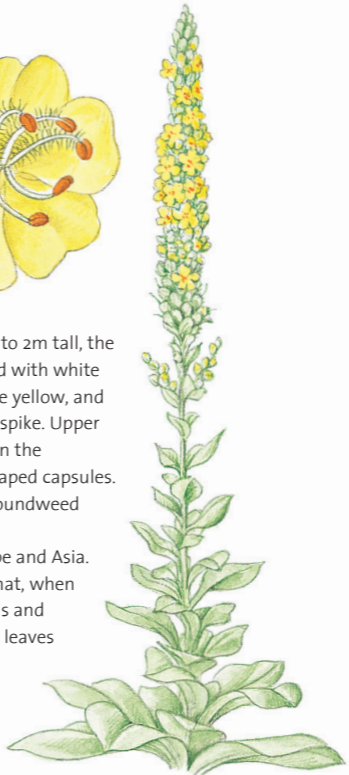
Verbascum thapsus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Biennial to 2m tall, the whole plant densely covered with white or greyish down. Flowers are yellow, and crowded in a long terminal spike. Upper stamens have white hairs on the filaments. Fruits are egg-shaped capsules. Also called Jacob's Staff, Woundweed and Torch Lily.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Europe and Asia.

USES Leaves provide a tea that, when strained, may soothe coughs and bronchial complaints. Fresh leaves may also be used to create compresses for wounds, burns or chilblains; dried leaves are added to herbal tobacco.



Common Valerian

Valeriana officinalis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Downy perennial to 1.5m tall, usually unbranched. Leaves are pinnate or pinnately lobed. Flowers are pale pink, funnel-shaped, unequally five-lobed and carried in a compound head made up of smaller dense heads. Also called All-heal, Herb Bennet and Summer Heliotrope.

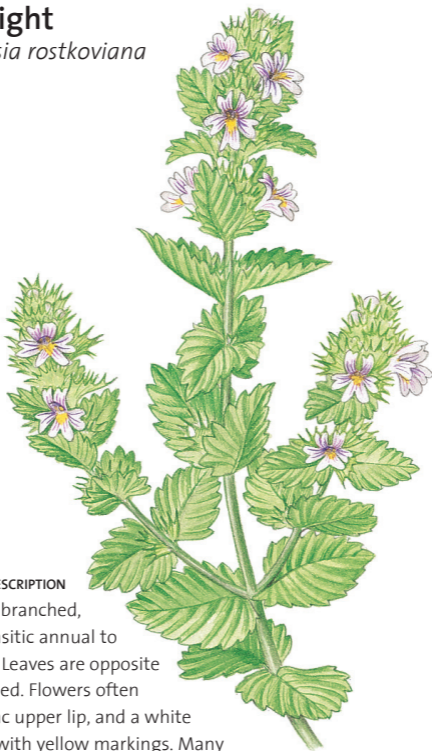
DISTRIBUTION Grown on damp ground in woods and grassy places from Europe to Japan.

USES Roots are dried and macerated in cold water. Used as a sedative drug, acting on the central nervous system, and may help anxiety, tension and nervous headaches. Reported to become addictive if used for long periods.



Eyebright

Euphrasia rostkoviana



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Erect and branched, semi-parasitic annual to 35cm tall. Leaves are opposite and toothed. Flowers often have a lilac upper lip, and a white lower lip with yellow markings. Many closely related species.

DISTRIBUTION Found in most of Europe and some adjacent areas.

USES Aerial parts are used to make a soothing eyewash. Also used for hayfever, colds and catarrh.

Foxglove

Digitalis purpurea



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Biennial or perennial to 1.8m tall. Basal leaves are softly hairy. Bell-shaped flowers to 5cm long form a long spike. Petals are purple, pink or white, usually spotted black inside.

DISTRIBUTION Native to western Europe.

USES Leaves yield the drug digitalin, which contains compounds that affect the cardiac muscle to increase the heartbeat. The similar Woolly Foxglove (*D. lanata*) from southern Europe has now largely replaced this species in commercial production. Extremely toxic, and can cause paralysis and sudden death if misused.

Ribwort Plantain

Plantago lanceolata



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial to 45cm tall. Forms a tuft of spear-shaped leaves to 15cm long, and long-stalked flower heads. Flowers are small and brownish. Fruits are oblong capsules; the tops detach to release the seeds.

DISTRIBUTION Common and widespread throughout Europe.

USES Young leaves can be eaten in salads, but are quite bitter and best cooked like spinach after the fibrous veins have been stripped out. Used since ancient times as a herbal remedy. Bruised or crushed leaves are styptic, helping to staunch bleeding and draw the pain from bites, stings and burns. They contain mucilage, tannins and silica, and an infusion is used for bronchitis, coughs and lung complaints.

Black Pepper

Piper nigrum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial woody vine to 6m tall, with smooth twining stems. Leaves are alternate, large, thick and leathery. Flowers are small, greenish, petal-less and carried on long drooping spikes produced at the leaf nodes. Berries ripen from green to orange to red. Also called Madagascar Plant and White Pepper.

DISTRIBUTION Native to tropical Asia, and widely cultivated in the tropics.

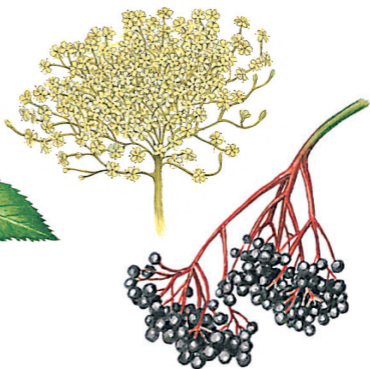
USES One of the earliest and most valued of the eastern spices.

With salt, a key ingredient of most savoury dishes. Black peppers are the dried unripe berries, and soaking and removing their outer skins yields the milder white peppers. Essential oil is used in rubbing oils to relieve pain and inflammation.



Elder

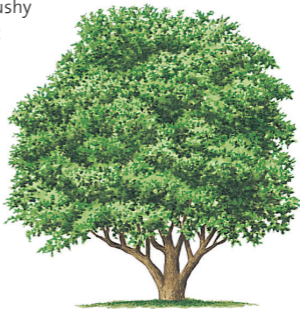
Sambucus nigra



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Small bushy tree or shrub, with fragrant white flowers and foetid, unpleasant-smelling foliage. Leaves are opposite, pinnate and have 5–7 leaflets. Flower heads are branched and flat-topped; followed by nodding black berries.

DISTRIBUTION Native to most of Europe, North Africa and western Asia.

USES Flowers and berries are traditionally used to make wines and cordials, and the berries are good in jams and pies; they should not be eaten raw. They are used as an infusion for catarrh and hayfever, as an eyewash and gargle, and to make a skin ointment. The leaves should not be eaten.



Boneset

Eupatorium perfoliatum



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 1.2m tall. Bases of each pair of lanceolate, wrinkled leaves are fused to encircle the stem. Flower heads consist of white or pale purple flowers carried in flat clusters.

DISTRIBUTION Native to North America.

USES Leaf tea was traditionally used by Native Americans and early settlers for fevers and influenza. Modern research suggests that it stimulates the immune system. Can be toxic in large doses.

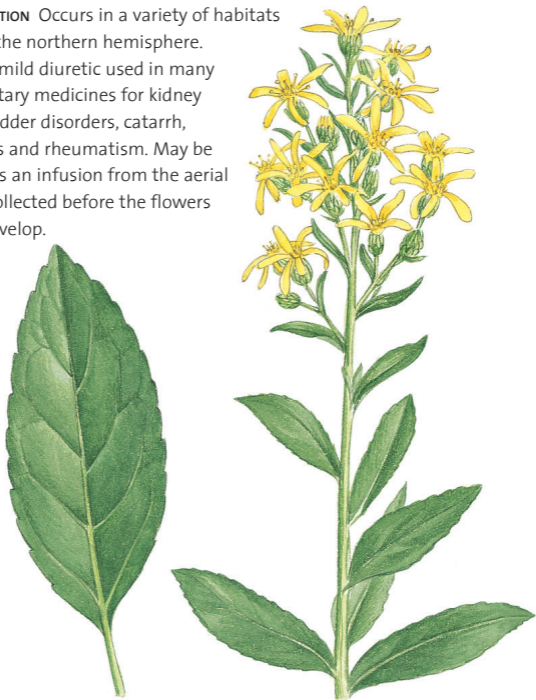
Goldenrod

Solidago virgaurea

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Downy perennial to 75cm tall. Leaves are lanceolate to ovate, and widest above the middle. Flower heads are yellow, with both disc and ray florets, and carried in branched spikes.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs in a variety of habitats across the northern hemisphere.

USES A mild diuretic used in many proprietary medicines for kidney and bladder disorders, catarrh, arthritis and rheumatism. May be taken as an infusion from the aerial parts collected before the flowers fully develop.



Yarrow

Achillea millefolium

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Erect, downy and aromatic perennial to 50cm tall. Leaves are much-divided and dark green. Flower heads are carried in flat-topped clusters. Also called Milfoil.

DISTRIBUTION Native to dry grassland in Europe and western Asia, and introduced in other places.

USES A traditional herb used across the northern hemisphere. An infusion made from the dried flowering plant is used for colds and fevers. Styptic properties, helping to control internal and external bleeding, and to clear blood clots. Contains at least one toxic compound, and in large doses may cause photosensitive skin reactions.



Elecampane

Inula helenium

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Downy perennial to 2.5m tall. Lower leaves are stalked, while upper leaves are stalkless and clasp the stem. Flower heads have yellow florets. Also called Elf Dock and Horse Elder.

DISTRIBUTION

Native to south-east Europe and western Asia, and cultivated and widely naturalized in other temperate areas of the world.

USES Used to flavour drinks and in confectionery. Tea made from the roots is employed as a traditional

remedy for asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia and whooping cough, and a root decoction is used to counter sciatica and skin diseases (hence its country name, Scabwort). The plant was formerly used to treat tuberculosis.



Sunflower

Helianthus annuus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Stout annual 3m or more tall. Flower heads may be to 30cm across, with golden ray florets surrounding the darker disc. Seeds are often striped black and white.

DISTRIBUTION Native to North America, and cultivated elsewhere both commercially and as a garden ornamental.

USES Best known as a source of high-quality edible oil, which is obtained from the seeds. Tea from the flowers is used for lung ailments and malaria; that from the leaves for fever and bites. Both can cause allergic reactions in some people.

Scented Mayweed

Matricaria recutita

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Strongly aromatic annual to 60cm tall, with much-divided leaves. White ray florets on the flower heads are turned downwards; the yellow central disc is high-domed and hollow. Also called German Chamomile.

DISTRIBUTION Probably native to southern and eastern Europe and parts of Asia, but widespread in the wild elsewhere.

USES Tea from the dried flowers is used for colic, insomnia, hyperactivity and anxiety. Topically, used for inflamed and itchy skin conditions. May cause an allergic reaction in some people. A constituent of skin ointments and shampoos.



Wild Chamomile

Chamaemelum nobile

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Hairy aromatic perennial to 15cm tall. Similar to Scented Mayweed (page 153), but the flower heads have a conical solid disc of yellow florets, and the white outer ray florets are sometimes lacking. Also called Roman Chamomile.

DISTRIBUTION Native to western Europe and North Africa, and often cultivated and naturalized elsewhere.

USES Forms mats, and is planted for chamomile lawns. Contains similar compounds to Scented Mayweed, and is sometimes used instead of it. May cause vomiting if taken in excess internally.



Tansy

Tanacetum vulgare



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Strongly aromatic perennial to 75cm tall, with pinnately lobed leaves. Flower heads are yellow, button-like and borne in flat-topped clusters.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs in most of Europe and northern Asia.

USES Dried aerial parts are a traditional insecticidal and vermifuge herb, once used internally and externally. Leaves can be hung indoors to deter flies, and added to insect-repellent sachets. Internal use is now discouraged because it is poisonous, the essential oil especially being fatal even in small doses.

Feverfew

Tanacetum parthenium

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Yellowish-green aromatic perennial to 50cm tall. Leaves are pinnately lobed. Flower heads comprise dense yellow central disc florets surrounded by white ray florets. Also called Pale Maids and Pellitory.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the Balkan Peninsula and western Asia, and long cultivated and naturalized in many parts of the world.

USES A sedative tea made from the leafy parts is a traditional remedy used for arthritis, colds and cramp. More recently, the herb has received attention as a cure for migraine. Should be used with care, since it can cause an allergic reaction in some people.



Costmary

Balsamita major

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Dull green, densely hairy perennial to 1.2m tall. Leaves are large, oblong and finely toothed. Flower heads are carried in branched clusters; white ray florets are sometimes absent, giving the heads a button-like appearance.

Also called Alecost, Camphor Plant, Lady's Balsam and Patagonian Mint.

DISTRIBUTION Native to western Asia, and widely introduced in Europe.

USES Traditionally used to flavour beers. It has a minty or balsam-like scent. Dried leaves may be added to insect-repellent sachets. Should not be used in cooking.



Wormwood

Artemisia absinthium



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

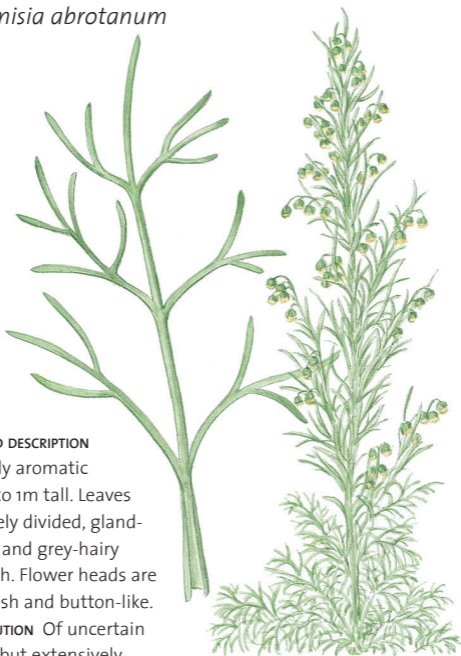
Aromatic woody perennial to 80cm tall. Leaves are grey-green, silky-hairy and 2–3 times pinnately lobed. Flower heads contain only disc florets.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs in most of Europe, but probably introduced in some areas.

USES One of the most bitter herbs known, and for centuries a major ingredient in liqueurs such as absinthe. As a herbal remedy, used as a tonic and digestive aid, and to expel worms. It has harmful effects on the central nervous system if taken in excess, and should not be used internally without consulting a qualified medical professional.

Southernwood

Artemisia abrotanum



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Strongly aromatic shrub to 1m tall. Leaves are finely divided, gland-dotted and grey-hairy beneath. Flower heads are yellowish and button-like.

DISTRIBUTION Of uncertain origin, but extensively cultivated and naturalized, especially in southern Europe.

USES Closely related to Wormwood (opposite) and similarly used as a tonic, to expel worms and, when dried, as a moth repellent. Strongly flavoured young leaves and shoots are bitter, with a taste of lemon and a strong lemon scent; they are used for flavouring cakes. Should not be used during pregnancy.

Tarragon

Artemisia dracunculus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Aromatic hairless perennial to 1.2m tall. Leaves are narrow and mostly entire, but lower ones are three-toothed at the tips. Flower heads are small, yellow, globose and drooping on down-curved stalks.

DISTRIBUTION Native to southern and eastern Russia, and widely cultivated and naturalized in many other areas.

USES Introduced into Britain in the mid-15th century. Used solely as a culinary herb, in many sauces, marinades and preserves. Best used fresh, or with the flavour preserved in oil or vinegar.

Mugwort

Artemisia vulgaris



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Tuft-forming aromatic perennial to 1.25m tall, with reddish stems. Leaves are stalkless with pointed lobes, green and hairless above, with silky-grey hair beneath. Flower heads are reddish-yellow, growing on many short woolly spikes.

DISTRIBUTION Common throughout Europe except the far north.

USES Leaves were once used as a bitter agent in beer, and dried to make tea. Used for flavouring dripping, and in sauces and salads. In healing, it is employed as a digestive stimulant and nerve tonic.

Colt's-foot

Tussilago farfara



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial with flowering stems to 15cm tall. These appear before the large, round, shallowly lobed and toothed leaves, which are green above and white-woolly beneath.

Flowers are yellow, and borne singly on stems with purple scales.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs in damp waste places in most of the temperate northern hemisphere.

USES A soothing tea or syrup from the leaves and flowers acts on the mucous membranes and is used for coughs and bronchial complaints. Dried leaves can be smoked for a similar effect and are thought to have antihistamine properties. Potentially toxic in large doses.

Marigold

Calendula officinalis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Much-branched perennial to 70cm tall. Leaves are oblong to spoon-shaped, glandular-downy or sparsely woolly. Flowers are large, daisy-like, and yellow or orange.

DISTRIBUTION Possibly originated in southern Europe, and cultivated in many areas of the world.

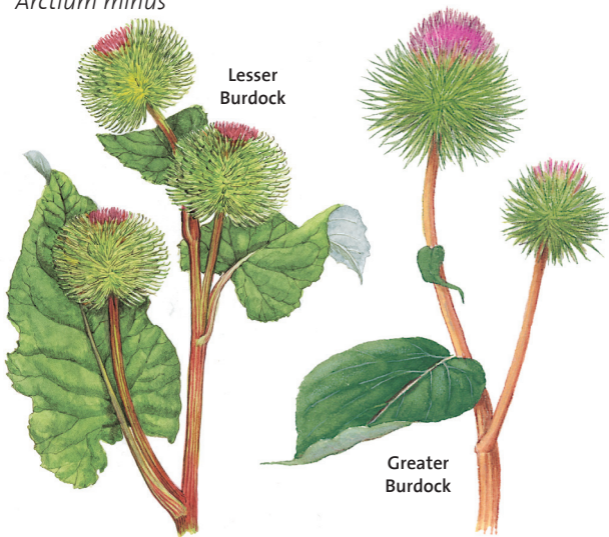
USES Edible flowers, collected as they are opening, make excellent additions to salads and omelettes. They can be used instead of Saffron (page

180) to colour rice and cakes. They are reputed to be antiseptic, anti-fungal and antibacterial, and are employed as compresses for burns and ulcers, and for chilblains and impetigo. Calendula tincture is sometimes used as a mouthwash for gum infections and mouth ulcers.



Lesser Burdock

Arctium minus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Coarse downy biennial to 1.5m tall. Leaves are broad, with heart-shaped bases and solid stalks. Flower heads are prickly, with only purple disc florets.

DISTRIBUTION Common throughout Europe and parts of western Asia.

USES Root is edible raw or cooked; it is best obtained from young plants, and usually peeled and sliced. Young leaves are edible raw or cooked. Young flowering stems can be peeled and eaten raw, or cooked like asparagus. Greater Burdock (*A. lappa*) is milder, and can be used in similar ways. Burdock is said to purify the blood, and is used for boils and other skin conditions.

Milk Thistle

Silybum marianum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Biennial to 1.5m tall. Erect stem with stalked, spiny and white-veined basal leaves; stem leaves are stalkless, clasp the stem and have yellowish-white spines. Flower heads have reddish-purple florets enclosed by large, fleshy and spiny bracts.

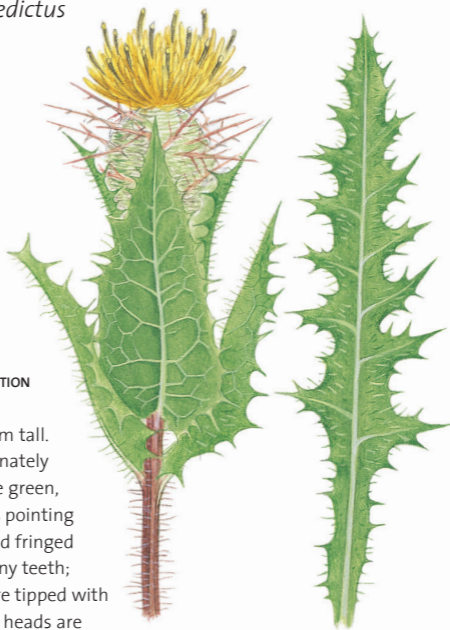
DISTRIBUTION Native to southern Europe and naturalized elsewhere. Locally common in southern Britain; possibly native near the sea.

USES Young leaves and stems, picked before the flowers develop and with their spines removed, can be cooked as a vegetable. Flower-head receptacles can be used in the same way as globe artichokes – the outer bracts are particularly good. Reputed to prevent and repair liver damage, and used against toxins such as alcohol, and for digestive and cholesterol problems.



Blessed Thistle

Cnicus benedictus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Cobweb-hairy annual to 60cm tall. Leaves are pinnately lobed and pale green, with the lobes pointing backwards, and fringed with small spiny teeth; stem leaves are tipped with spines. Flower heads are

large with yellow florets, and surrounded by the upper leaves.

DISTRIBUTION Found wild in the Mediterranean, and cultivated and naturalized elsewhere.

USES Slightly toxic in large doses, causing nausea, but a weak tea from the flowering plant is said to be good for various ailments, from colds to migraines, jaundice and ringworm. Mainly used as a digestive tonic and appetite reviver.

Safflower

Carthamus tinctorius



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

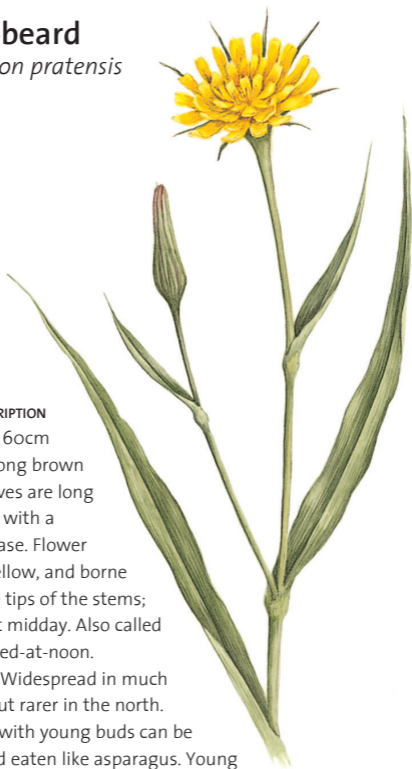
Spiny, thistle-like annual to 60cm tall. Basal leaves are pinnately lobed; stem leaves are undivided. Flower heads have spiny, leaf-like bracts and numerous brilliant yellow, orange or red florets. Also called False Saffron and Dyer's Saffron.

DISTRIBUTION Native to western Asia, and cultivated and often naturalized in southern and central Europe.

USES Principally a dye plant. Flowers yield red for dyeing silk, and yellow for colouring food; sometimes used as a substitute for Saffron (page 180). Seeds are a source of a low-cholesterol dietary oil, used mainly as a cooking oil, in salad dressings and for making margarine.

Goat's-beard

Tragopogon pratensis



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial to 60cm tall, with a long brown taproot. Leaves are long and pointed with a sheathing base. Flower heads are yellow, and borne singly at the tips of the stems; they close at midday. Also called Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon.

DISTRIBUTION Widespread in much of Europe, but rarer in the north.

USES Stems with young buds can be steamed and eaten like asparagus. Young leaves, shoot tips and chopped taproot can be added to salads, soups and stews. Fully developed taproot can be peeled and eaten like Salsify (page 173). As a herbal remedy, it is used mainly for urinary tract ailments, water retention and digestive disorders.

Cat's-ear

Hypochaeris radicata



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial to 50cm tall, with basal leaves only, which are long, narrow and irregularly lobed. Flower heads consist of bright yellow florets cupped by small scaly bracts, borne on the tips of long flower stalks.

DISTRIBUTION Common throughout Europe except the far north.

USES Young leaves can be used in salads or cooked like spinach. Roots can be roasted and ground to form a coffee substitute.

Rough Hawkbit

Leontodon hispidus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 35cm tall, with a rosette of pinnately lobed leaves. Flower heads are composed of bright yellow florets, the outer rays being orange or reddish beneath and cupped by large green bracts; they are borne singly on long flower stalks.

DISTRIBUTION Common throughout Europe except northern Scotland and the far north, growing in pastures, meadows and other grassy places on lime-rich soils.

USES Young leaves can be used in salads or cooked like spinach in the same way as those of Common Dandelion (opposite). An infusion of the leaves is used for kidney complaints, dropsy and jaundice.

Common Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 35cm tall, with a rosette of usually pinnately lobed leaves. Flower heads appear on stout hollow stalks; only yellow ray florets are present.

DISTRIBUTION Widespread in temperate grassland and on waste ground.

USES Whole plant is edible. Leaves and flowers are rich in vitamins, particularly A and C. Leaves can be used in salads or cooked like spinach. Flowers are used for wine, and buds can be pickled like capers. Dried roots can be roasted to make a coffee substitute. Leaves and fresh roots make a diuretic tea, and the herb is used as a remedy for kidney and liver ailments.

Chicory

Cichorium intybus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Blue-flowered perennial with branched stems to 1m tall. Basal leaves are pinnately lobed; stem leaves may be entire and clasp the stem. Flower heads contain ray florets only, and are to 3cm across and carried in small groups.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Europe, North Africa and western Asia, and introduced to most other temperate regions.

USES Root is best known as an additive to or substitute for coffee. Very young, blanched leaves are a popular salad vegetable. Extracts from the roots have been used as diuretics and laxatives.

Salsify

Tragopogon porrifolius



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial to 1.25m tall with long linear leaves that are wider at the bases. Solitary flower heads are to 5cm across, with dull purple florets.

DISTRIBUTION Grows in grassland, wasteland and old cultivated ground. Native to the Mediterranean and central Europe, and widely naturalized through cultivation elsewhere in Europe.

USES Dried and ground root was once used as a substitute for flour. Flowers make attractive decorations for salads. Peeled roots can be boiled or steamed and served on their own. When the leaves are about 10–15cm long, they can be steamed like asparagus.

Redroot Pigweed

Amaranthus retroflexus



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Upright, almost unbranched annual to 1m tall. Leaves are alternate, oval and pointed. Flowers are small, and borne in dense clusters on short spikes. Also called Common Amaranth.

DISTRIBUTION North American species common in southern and central Europe, including Britain, but rarer elsewhere.

USES Young leaves have a pleasant mild flavour and may be eaten raw in salads or cooked like spinach. When ground into flour, the seeds can be used in soups and to reinforce the protein content of wheat flour in breads. The plant has astringent soothing properties, and is used to control bleeding and diarrhoea.

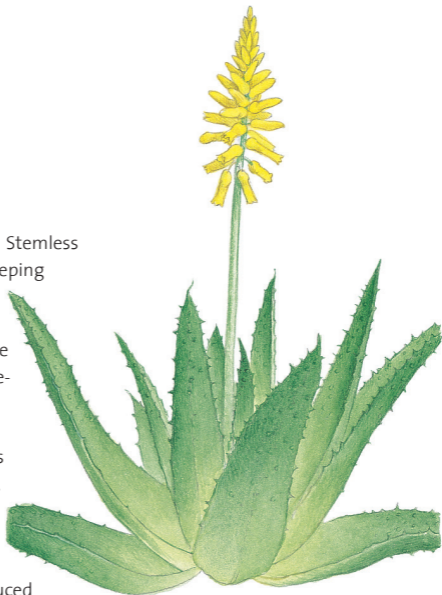
Aloe

Aloe vera

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Stemless perennial with creeping stolons, forming clusters of leaf rosettes. Leaves are to 60cm long, blue-green and spiny, sometimes tinged red. Yellow flowers are to 30mm long, drooping and cylindrical; carried on spikes to 50cm tall, they are produced only in warm climates. Also called Barbados Aloe and Bitter Aloes.

DISTRIBUTION Native to arid areas of Africa and now cultivated in most subtropical and tropical areas. Frequently grown as a houseplant in temperate areas.

USES Used as a herb in the Middle East since ancient times. Often employed in suntan lotions, hand creams, shampoos and cosmetics. Leaves yield a soothing medicinal gel, which stimulates skin regeneration in cuts and burns. Juice from the cut leaves is a strong emetic and should not be used internally in fresh form.



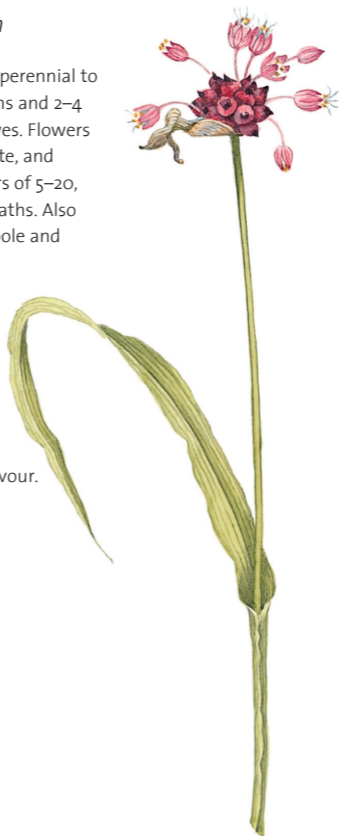
Sand Leek

Allium scorodoprasum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Bulbous perennial to 1m tall, with cylindrical stems and 2–4 long and flat sheathing leaves. Flowers are bell-shaped, pink or white, and arranged in terminal clusters of 5–20, enclosed by two papery sheaths. Also called Giant Garlic, Rocamboles and Spanish Garlic.

DISTRIBUTION Locally distributed on banks, rough grassland and scree edges in central and eastern Europe, including Britain.

USES Bulbs can be used like garlic, and have a milder flavour.



Chives

Allium schoenoprasum



SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Tuft-forming perennial to 40cm tall, with narrowly conical bulbs less than 1cm in diameter attached to a short rhizome. Stem and 1–2 slender leaves are cylindrical and hollow. Flowers are lilac to pale purple, or rarely white, bell-shaped and crowded in a dense umbel.

DISTRIBUTION Occurs in most of the northern hemisphere, and widely cultivated.

USES Milder and more delicate flavour than that of the related onions, and useful in egg dishes, salads, soups and soft cheeses. Finely chopped leaves rather than the bulbs are used, and are best added to dishes at the end of cooking in order for their flavour to be retained.

Wild Garlic

Allium vineale

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 60cm tall. Leaves are slender and hollow tubes that are grey-green in colour. Flowers are long-stalked, and are arranged in clusters protected by papery sheaths. Also called Crow Garlic.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Europe, north Africa and western Asia, growing in dry grassland and on roadside verges.

USES All parts of the plant have a strong garlic odour. Sometimes used as a substitute for garlic. Leaves can be freshly chopped into salads and dressings, and go well with seafood and lamb. Flowers may be dipped in batter and deep-fried, or added to salads. Bulbs can be used in the same way as those of cultivated garlic.



Lily-of-the-valley

Convallaria majalis

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Perennial to 25cm tall. Leaves are ovate, arising from a creeping rhizome, their sheathing bases forming the stem. Bell-shaped flowers are white or pink, fragrant and carried on an erect spike. Also called May Lily, Lady's Tears and May Bells.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the cool temperate northern hemisphere in Europe and north-east Asia, and a common garden plant.

USES Leaves contain cardiac glycosides similar to those in Foxglove (page 144), and have a similar effect in regulating and strengthening the heartbeat. An essential oil from the flowers is used in perfumery and other scented products, such as soaps and hand lotions. All parts of the plant are poisonous and should only be used under medical supervision.



Saffron

Crocus sativus

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Autumn-flowering plant with grass-like leaves that appear before the flowers. These are goblet-shaped, and lilac-purple with a yellowish throat; the prominent three-branched style is orange. Also called St Valentine's Rose.

DISTRIBUTION Does not exist in the wild.

Possibly of eastern Mediterranean origin, selectively developed from *C. cartwrightianus* in ancient times.

USES Well-known food dye imparting a sweet aroma and an orange-yellow colour to rice dishes, soups and cakes. Only the large styles are used, and at least 60,000 flowers are needed to yield a pound of Saffron. As a result, it has always been expensive, and today inferior substitutes such as Turmeric (page 185) are often used instead.



Lemon Grass

Cymbopogon citratus

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Clump-forming aromatic perennial with flowering stems to 2m tall. Leaves are to 60cm long, and tapered at both ends. Flowers are carried in a large plume-like panicle with a drooping tip. Also called Serai and Squinant.

DISTRIBUTION Native to southern India and Sri Lanka, and widely cultivated in the tropics and occasionally elsewhere.

USES Strongly scented leaves are popular in culinary use for imparting a lemon flavour to dishes. Tea made from the fresh leaves is reputed to help the digestion and elevate mood. Scent is due to the presence of citral, and oil distilled from the plant is used in the perfume industry and in the artificial synthesis of vitamin A. Also used as an insect repellent.



Couch Grass

Elytrigia repens

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Dull-to bluish-green perennial with tough, far-creeping rhizomes. Flowering spikes are to 2m long, slender, unbranched and composed of paired spikelets arranged alternately. Fruits are small dry nutlets. Also called Twitch, Dog Grass, Quackgrass and Witchgrass.

DISTRIBUTION Common and widespread in maritime grassland in many regions of the northern hemisphere, becoming invasive in some places.

USES Used in herbal medicine since Classical Greek times. Pale rhizomes are used to produce a tea or decoction. A diuretic rich in minerals and vitamins A and B, the herb has antibiotic properties and is used for kidney stones and other urinary tract complaints.



Sweet-flag

Acorus calamus

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial to 1m tall. Leaves are linear, with wavy margins, and aromatic when crushed. Flowers are yellowish-green, tiny and packed into a compact up-curved spike.

DISTRIBUTION Native to southern and eastern Asia, and naturalized in Europe.

USES Used since ancient times. Sweet-scented roots are used in herbal medicine and perfumery. May reduce stomach acidity and benefit the digestion. Also used as an expectorant, and to ease various respiratory ailments. Some strains contain a carcinogen, absent from other strains, and the herb should not be used without consulting a qualified medical practitioner.



Ginger

Zingiber officinale

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial to 1m tall, with short, fleshy and knobby, branched rhizomes.

Stems are erect with two ranks of leaves, the sheathing leaf stalks forming the stem itself. Flowers are yellow or white, with a purple lower lip, forming dense, cone-like spikes. Also called East Indian Ginger and Stem Ginger.

DISTRIBUTION Native to tropical South-east Asia, and also cultivated in Africa and the Caribbean.

USES Fresh or dried rhizome of Ginger, either peeled or not, is a culinary spice that is a key ingredient of Asian, African and Caribbean cuisines. The crystallized and candied stem is an ingredient in baking, jams and confectionery. Dried Ginger is used in many recipes for cakes, pastries and biscuits, as well as in commercial spice mixtures. Makes a warming and mildly stimulating remedy for the digestion, circulation and bronchial complaints.



Turmeric

Curcuma domestica

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial to 1m tall similar to Ginger (opposite), to which it is closely related, but the leaves are all basal, and their sheathing stalks rarely form a stem. Rhizomes are about 2.5cm in diameter, yellowish on the outside and deep orange within.

DISTRIBUTION Probably native to India, and cultivated there and in other tropical areas.

USES Boiled, dried and powdered rhizome has a characteristic pungent smell.

Widely employed as a flavouring and colouring agent for imparting a brilliant yellow hue to various dishes, often as a less expensive substitute for Saffron (page 180); an essential ingredient in Indian cuisine. Used in curry powders, chutneys and pickles, and in the Moroccan spice blend *chermoula*. Sometimes used as an antiseptic for minor cuts and burns.



Cardamom

Elettaria cardamomum

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Perennial to 3.5m tall, related to Ginger (page 184), with thick fleshy rhizomes and very tall sterile stems formed by the sheathing leaf stalks. Flowering stems are leafless and spreading. Flowers are white with blue and yellow markings, and a single protruding stamen. Capsules are to 2cm long, ovoid and greenish-grey, each containing 3–4 brown seeds.

DISTRIBUTION Native to the hills of southern India, and also cultivated in Sri Lanka and parts of Central America.

USES Capsules are harvested unripe and dried whole. Dried ground seeds are used to flavour sweet and savoury dishes, particularly in Indian and South-east Asian cuisines, and for spicing wines. Seeds have pain-relieving, antispasmodic and anti-inflammatory properties, useful for stomach disorders and urine retention.



Vanilla

Vanilla planifolia

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Evergreen climbing orchid to 30m tall, with fleshy leaves. Flowers are to 70mm long, and greenish-yellow with an inrolled, orange-striped lower lip. Pods are to 20cm long and fragrant when ripe; they contain many tiny seeds.

DISTRIBUTION Native to Central America, and cultivated throughout the tropics, particularly in Madagascar.

USES First used by the Aztecs to flavour chocolate drinks, and introduced to Europe by the Spanish. Unique

flavour is due to vanillin crystals on the surfaces of the pods. The pods are used as a culinary flavouring, particularly in cakes, pastries and desserts, though synthetic essences are also available. Commercially used in soft drinks and liqueurs such as Galliano, and in perfumery and fragrant household products like candles.



Arrowhead

Sagittaria sagittifolia

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION

Upright and hairless aquatic perennial to 90cm tall, with large tubers. Aerial leaves are shaped like arrowheads and borne on long upright stalks; floating leaves are pointed or oval, and lack the basal lobes of the aerial leaves. Flowers are about 2.5cm



wide and have three white petals, each with a purple spot at the base. Also called Swamp Potato and Water Archer.

Flowers are about 2.5cm wide and have three white petals, each with a purple spot at the base. Also called Swamp Potato and Water Archer.

DISTRIBUTION Common in southern Britain and on the Continent, except the far north and south.

USES Starchy tubers can be boiled; skins have a slightly bitter potato flavour and they should be removed after cooking. Dried tubers can be ground into a flour, and combined with cereal flour to make cakes and biscuits. Tubers should not be eaten raw.

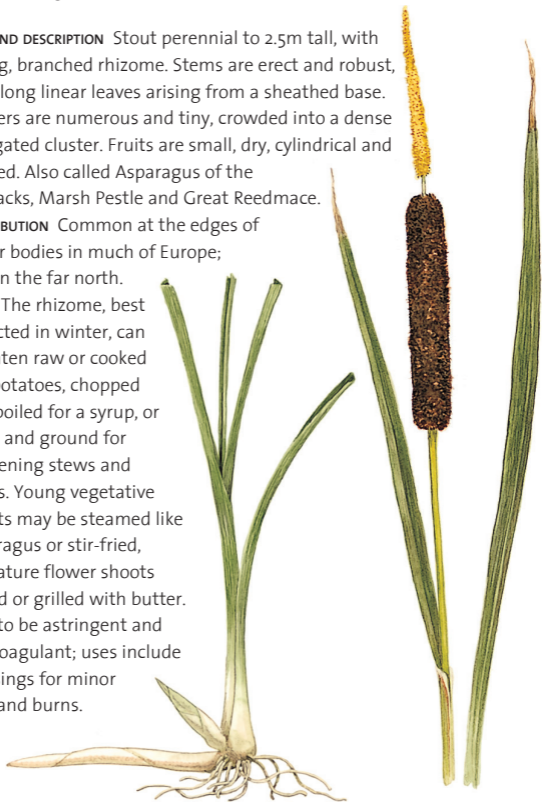
Bulrush

Typha latifolia

SIZE AND DESCRIPTION Stout perennial to 2.5m tall, with a long, branched rhizome. Stems are erect and robust, with long linear leaves arising from a sheathed base. Flowers are numerous and tiny, crowded into a dense elongated cluster. Fruits are small, dry, cylindrical and stalked. Also called Asparagus of the Cossacks, Marsh Pestle and Great Reedmace.

DISTRIBUTION Common at the edges of water bodies in much of Europe; rare in the far north.

USES The rhizome, best collected in winter, can be eaten raw or cooked like potatoes, chopped and boiled for a syrup, or dried and ground for thickening stews and soups. Young vegetative shoots may be steamed like asparagus or stir-fried, immature flower shoots boiled or grilled with butter. Said to be astringent and anticoagulant; uses include dressings for minor cuts and burns.



Index

Common Names

- Agrimony 48
 Alexanders 95
 Alexandrian Senna 58
 Allspice 74
 Aloe 175
 Anise 84
 Apothecary's Rose 46
 Arrowhead 188
 Asafoetida 96
 Betony 118
 Bilberry 99
 Biting Stonecrop 43
 Black Pepper 146
 Bloodroot 26
 Black Mustard 29
 Blessed Thistle 166
 Bogbean 103
 Bog-myrtle 13
 Boneset 148
 Borage 110
 Broom 55
 Bulrush 189
 Caper 37
 Caraway 91
 Cardamom 186
 Cascara Sagrada 66
 Cassia 39
 Castor Oil Plant 62
 Cat's-ear 169
 Chervil 81
 Chicory 172
 Chilli Pepper 137
 Chinese Ginseng 79
 Chives 177
 Cinnamon 38
 Cleavers 106
 Clove Pink 22
 Cloves 75
 Colt's-foot 162
 Common Chickweed 21
 Common Comfrey 109
 Common Dandelion 171
 Common Evening-primrose 76
 Common Jasmine 102
 Common Lavender 130
 Common Mallow 69
 Common Nettle 14
 Common Poppy 25
 Common Sage 121
 Common Scurvygrass 32
 Common Sorrel 16
 Common Thyme 124
 Common Valerian 142
 Coriander 83
 Costmary 157
 Couch Grass 182
 Cow Parsley 82
 Cranberry 100
 Cumin 88
 Deadly Nightshade 135
 Dill 86
 Dog-rose 45
 Elder 147
 Elecampane 151
 Eyebright 143
 Fat-hen 18
 Fennel 87
 Fenugreek 57
 Feverfew 156
 Field Penny-cress 36
 Foxglove 144
 Frankincense 64
 Garden Angelica 92
 Garden Parsley 90
 Garlic Mustard 27
 Ginger 184
 Goat's-beard 168
 Goldenrod 149
 Good-King-Henry 17
 Greater Burdock 164
 Great Mullein 141
 Great Yellow Gentian 101
 Ground-elder 85
 Ground-ivy 134
 Hairy Bitter-cress 34
 Hawthorn 52
 Heartsease 72
 Hop 12
 Horseradish 28
 Hyssop 119
 Jewel Weed 54
 Juniper 10
 Lady's Bedstraw 105
 Lemon Balm 117
 Lemon Grass 181
 Lemon Verbena 112
 Lesser Burdock 164
 Lily-of-the-valley 179
 Lime 67
 Liquorice 56
 Lovage 93
 Lungwort 108
 Mandrake 139
 Marigold 163
 Marsh-mallow 68
 Meadowsweet 47
 Milk Thistle 165
 Monk's-hood 23
 Motherwort 116
 Mugwort 161
 Nasturtium 60
 Nutmeg and Mace 78
 Opium Poppy 24
 Oregano 122
 Parsley-piert 51
 Pennyroyal 128
 Perforate St John's-wort 70
 Pignut 97
 Raspberry 44
 Red Bergamot 129
 Red Dead-nettle 133
 Redroot Pigweed 174
 Ribwort Plantain 145
 Rosemary 131
 Rose-scented Geranium 61
 Rough Hawkbit 170
 Rue 63
 Safflower 167
 Saffron 180

- Salad Burnet 49
 Salsify 173
 Sandalwood 15
 Sand Leek 176
 Scented Mayweed 153
 Scots Lovage 94
 Sea Beet 19
 Sea Purslane 20
 Sesame 140
 Shepherd's-purse 35
 Southernwood 159
 Spear Mint 126
 Star-anise 41
 Summer Savory 120
 Sunflower 152
 Surinam Quassia-wood 65
 Sweet Basil 113
 Sweet Bay 40
 Sweet Cicely 80
 Sweet-flag 183
 Sweet Marjoram 123
 Sweet Pepper 136
 Sweet Violet 71
 Tamarind 59
 Tansy 155
 Tarragon 160
 Tasmanian Blue Gum 73
 Thornapple 138
 Turmeric 185
 Vanilla 187
 Vervain 111
 Virginian Skullcap 114
 Water-cress 31
 Water Mint 127
 Whitebeam 53
 White Dead-nettle 132
 White Horehound 115
 White Mustard 30
 White Willow 11
 Wild Celery 89
 Wild Chamomile 154
 Wild Garlic 178
 Wild Thyme 125
 Winter-cress 33
 Wintergreen 98
 Witch-hazel 77
 Wood Avens 50
 Woodruff 104
 Wormwood 158
 Yarrow 150
 Yellow-bark 107
 Ylang-Ylang 42
- Scientific Names**
- Achillea millefolium* 150
Aconitum napellus 23
Acorus calamus 183
Aegopodium podagraria 85
Agrimonia eupatoria 48
Alliaria petiolata 27
Allium sativum
Allium schoenoprasum 177
Allium scorodoprasum 176
Allium ursinum 178
Aloe vera 175
Aloysia citrodora 112
Althaea officinalis 68
Amaranthus retroflexus 174
Anethum graveolens 86
Angelica archangelica 92
Anthriscus cerefolium 81
Anthriscus sylvestris 82
Aphanes arvensis 51
Apium graveolens 89
Arctium lappa 164
Arctium minus 164
Armoracia rusticana 28
Artemisia abrotanum 159
Artemisia absinthium 158
Artemisia dracuncululus 160
Artemisia vulgaris 161
Atriplex portulacoides 20
Atropa belladonna 135
Balsamita major 157
Barbarea vulgaris 33
Beta vulgaris maritima 19
Borago officinalis 110
Boswellia sacra 64
Brassica nigra 29
Calendula officinalis 163
Cananga odorata 42
Capparis spinosa 37
Capsella bursa-pastoris 35
Capsicum annuum 136
Capsicum frutescens 137
Cardamine hirsuta 34
Carthamus tinctorius 167
Carum carvi 91
Cassia angustifolia 58
Chamaemelum nobile 154
Chenopodium album 18
Chenopodium bonus-henricus 17
Cichorium intybus 172
Cinchona calisaya 107
Cinnamomum aromaticum 39
Cinnamomum zeylanicum 38
Cnicus benedictus 166
Cochlearia officinalis 32
Conopodium majus 97
Convallaria majalis 179
Coriandrum sativum 83
Crataegus monogyna 52
Crocus sativus 180
Cuminum cyminum 88
Curcuma domestica 185
Cymbopogon citratus 181
Cytisus scoparius 55
Datura stramonium 138
Dianthus caryophyllus 22
Digitalis purpurea 144
Elettaria cardamomum 186
Elytrigia repens 182
Eucalyptus globus 73
Eupatorium perfoliatum 148
Euphrasia rostkoviana 143

- Ferula assa-foetida* 96
Filipendula ulmaria 47
Foeniculum vulgare 87
Galium aparine 106
Galium odoratum 104
Galium verum 105
Gaultheria
 procumbens 98
Gentiana lutea 101
Geum urbanum 50
Glechoma hederacea 134
Glycyrrhiza glabra 56
Hamamelis virginiana 77
Helianthus annuus 152
Humulus lupulus 12
Hypericum
 perforatum 70
Hypochaeris radicata 169
Hyssopus officinalis 119
Illicium verum 41
Impatiens capensis 54
Inula helenium 151
Jasminum officinale 102
Juniperus communis 10
Lamium album 132
Lamium purpureum 133
Laurus nobilis 40
Lavandula
 angustifolia 130
Leontodon hispidus 170
Leonurus cardiaca 116
Levisticum officinale 93
Ligusticum scoticum 94
Malva sylvestris 69
Mandragora
 officinarum 139
Marrubium vulgare 115
Matricaria recutita 153
Melissa officinalis 117
Mentha aquatica 127
Mentha pulegium 128
Mentha spicata 126
Menyanthes trifoliata
 103
Monarda didyma 129
Myrica gale 13
Myristica fragrans 78
Myrrhis odorata 80
Ocimum basilicum 113
Oenothera biennis 76
Origanum majorana 123
Origanum vulgare 122
Panax ginseng 79
Papaver rhoeas 25
Papaver somniferum 24
Pelargonium
 graveolens 61
Petroselinum crispum 90
Pimenta dioica 74
Pimpinella anisum 84
Piper nigrum 146
Plantago lanceolata 145
Pulmonaria
 officinalis 108
Quassia amara 65
Rhamnus purshiana 66
Ricinus communis 62
Rorippa nasturtium-
 aquaticum 31
Rosa canina 45
Rosa gallica var.
 officinalis 46
Rosmarinus officinalis 131
Rubus idaeus 44
Rumex acetosa 16
Ruta graveolens 63
Sagittaria sagittifolia 188
Salix alba 11
Salvia officinalis 121
Sambucus nigra 147
Sanguinaria
 canadensis 26
Sanguisorba minor 49
Santalum album 15
Satureja hortensis 120
Scutellaria lateriflora 114
Sedum acre 43
Sesamum orientale 140
Sinapis alba 30
Silybum marianum 165
Smyrnium olusatrum 95
Solidago virgaurea 149
Sorbus aria 53
Stachys officinalis 118
Stellaria media 21
Symphytum
 officinale 109
Syzygium aromaticum 75
Tamarindus indica 59
Tanacetum
 parthenium 156
Tanacetum vulgare 155
Taraxacum officinale 171
Thlaspi arvense 36
Thymus serpyllum 125
Thymus vulgaris 124
Tilia x vulgaris 67
Tragopogon
 parrifolius 173
Tragopogon pratensis
 168
Trigonella foenum-
 graecum 57
Tropaeolum majus 60
Tussilago farfara 162
Typha latifolia 189
Urtica dioica 14
Vaccinium myrtillus 99
Vaccinium oxycoccos 100
Valeriana officinalis 142
Vanilla planifolia 187
Verbascum thapsus 141
Verbena officinalis 111
Viola odorata 71
Viola tricolor 72
Zingiber officinale 184