

## SOUTHERNWOOD



### *Artemisia abrotanum*

[ar-te-MIZ-ee-uh ab-ro-TAN-um]

**Family:** Compositae

**Names:** Lad's Love, Boy's Love, Old Man, Applingie; garde robe, aurone, citronelle, aurone mâle (French); Eberraure, Citronkraut, Stabkraut, Stabwurz, Aberraute, Abberaute; Eberraute, Eberries (German); Abrótino, Cidronella; Erba reale, abrotano macho, boja, hierba lombriguera (Italian); Artemisia; Abrotano (Spanish); Citroenkruid, Averoom, Limoenkruid, Krampkruid (Dutch); Abrotano (Esperanto); Sidrunpuju (Estonian); Aaprottimaruna (Finnish); Meath chaltuinn

(Gaelic); Abrodd (Norwegian); Bylica, Boze drzewko (Polish); Kustarnikovaya polyn (Russian); Abrodd (Swedish); Boze drzewko (Polish); ch'ing hao (Chinese); afsantin-e-hind (Arabic)

**Description:** Many-branched with individual branches resembling miniature trees. The height is 3-5 feet with a width of 1 foot. The flowers are yellow-white and small. The leaves are green, feathery, aromatic with a bitter lemon scent. It blooms late autumn.

**Cultivation:** It's a perennial to zone 5. Space 2 feet apart in well drained soil with a pH of 5.5-7.5 in full sun. Propagate by root division, cuttings or layering as it rarely flowers and doesn't produce viable seed when it does. Pruning keeps the plant from getting too straggly. The leaves dry easily on the stems which may be hung up or put in a brown bag.

**History:** The Latin name of the plant, *abrotonum* is from the Greek *habrotonón* meaning elegant. At its arrival in 1548, the English called it *suthernewude* or "a woody plant from the south" and used it as a strewing herb. It's also thought to be a contraction of "southern wormwood". The Estonian name *sidrunpuju* contains *sidrun* "lemon" and *puju* "mugwort" for a perceived lemon-scented variety of mugwort. The French named it *garde robe* because they placed it among their woolens to deter moths. Southernwood ashes were mixed with olive oil to promote hair growth, giving rise to both the common names, young lad's love and old man's beard. The leaves were included in bouquets given to women being courted. Women carried southern wood nosegays, with lemon balm, to church so they wouldn't feel drowsy. Judges

used it with rue and rosemary to protect themselves from typhoid in the courtroom. In Poland, Southernwood was placed in the shoe of a bride to protect her against any evil intent. Language of Flowers: bantering, jesting.

**Constituents:** essential oil (absinthol); abrotanin and tannins

**Properties:** bitter, emmenagogue, anthelmintic, anti-microbial, stimulant

**Medicinal Uses:** Southernwood encourages menstruation, is antiseptic and kills intestinal worms. It was used to treat liver, spleen and stomach problems. It is seldom used medicinally today, except in Germany, where poultices are placed on wounds, splinters and skin conditions and it is employed occasionally to treat frostbite. Its constituents have been shown to stimulate the gallbladder and bile, which improves digestion and liver functions. The leaves are mixed with other herbs in aromatic baths and is said to counter sleepiness. Can be taken as a tea of 1 Tbsp of dried leaves to each cup of boiling water. Sweeten with honey. Drink three times a day or take 1-4ml of the tincture three times a day. Combines well with false unicorn root for delayed menstruation.

*Combinations:*

Delayed menstruation: false unicorn root

*Dosage:*

Infusion: Pour a cup of boiling water onto 1-2 tsp of the dried herb and leave to infuse for 10-15 minutes in a closed container. This should be drunk three times a day.

Tincture: 1-4 ml 3 times a day

**Cautions:** Do not take during pregnancy. Not suitable for children under 12 unless prescribed professionally.

**Cosmetic Uses:**

**NIGHT CREAM:** Gather a handful of plantain leaves, southernwood, black currant and angelica leaves and one of elder flowers and place in a saucepan with a cupful of almond or olive oil. Simmer for 30 minutes and strain off

the oil. Rewarm the oil and add 1 oz white beeswax before removing to cool. Pour into jars before the mixture sets.

For the bath: Simmer in a pan for 10 minutes a handful of leaves of rosemary, lemon balm, bergamot, hyssop, southernwood and lemon thyme together with a handful of chamomile flowers. There should be about 1 lb of herbs to 2 pints of water. Then strain and when cold, add the liquid 1/5 part of brandy or whiskey which will keep it for 2 months. Use a little in a warm bath to tone the flesh, cleanse the skin of impurities and relax the muscles.

**Ritual Uses:** Believed to protect the home from witches and evil spirits by stewing liberally on floors and hanging above the threshold. It has been used by men to increase their virility. Young men placed southernwood in bouquets of flowers to encourage young women to feel love and lust for them. Southernwood may be used to represent a promise to be faithful to one's intended lover. One usage would be in the ritual baths in preparation for a Handfasting or ritual of union. Men who wish to increase their magickal testosterone might try working with southernwood.

**Other Uses:** It is an insect repellent. The stems yield yellow dye and the foliage is used in decorations.

*Southernwood Moth Bags*

1 cup dried southernwood

1 cup dried rosemary

1 cup dried lavender

¼ cup ground cloves

¼ cup crushed cinnamon sticks

Combine all the ingredients thoroughly and put the mixture in small bags or sachets.

*Southernwood Fragrant Floor Cleaner*

Boil a large bunch of lavender, southernwood or wormwood and tansy in 2-3 gallons of water for 10-15 minutes. Add ¼ cup vinegar, then cool. Strain the mixture and pour into a bucket. Mop floors for a cleansing, pleasing fragrance.

**Culinary Uses:** Although bitter, southernwood is used in some European cooking, in one

example it was used as a smoldering bed of branches for roasting lamb and is mostly suited for meats to flavor aromatic and rather fat meat (pork, duck, goose, mutton) or to add to bland meat (veal). It is also eaten in salads in Italy and cooked as a vegetable.

### **Recipes:**

#### **Southernwood Cake**

1½ cup all purpose flour

½ cup self-rising flour

1 cup sugar

4 tsp southernwood leaves, finely chopped

4 eggs

¾ cup butter, melted and cooled

Grease and flour an 8-inch springform pan. Sift the flours into a large bowl. Stir in the sugar and southernwood. In a separate bowl, beat the eggs lightly then stir in the cooled butter. Stir the butter mixture into the flour mixture. Beat for 1 minute. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake in a preheated 350 oven for 30 minutes to 1 hour or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool for 5-10 minutes then remove sides of the pan. Serve with lightly sweetened whipped cream. (An Herbal Collection)

### **References:**

A Compendium of Herbal Magick, Paul Beyerl, Phoenix Publishing, 1998, ISBN: 0-919345-45-X

Cosmetics from the Earth, Roy Genders, Alfred Van der Marck, 1985; ISBN: 0-912383-20-8

An Herbal Collection, Herb Society of Wake County, 1993

Herbs, Growing & Using the Plants of Romance, Bill and Sylvia Varney, Ironwood Press, 1998; ISBN: 0-9628236-7-8

The Illustrated Herb Encyclopedia, Kathi Keville, Mallard Press, 1991; ISBN: 0-7924-5307-7

The Magic of Herbs, Jane Newdick, Salamander, 1991; ISBN: 0-8317-5794-9

### **Resources:**

Companion Plants, 7247 No Coolville Ridge Rd., Athens, OH 45701; 740-592-4643;  
[www.companionplants.com](http://www.companionplants.com) plants

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