

## MUGWORT



### *Artemisia vulgaris*

[ar-te-MIZ-ee-uh vul-GAY-ris]

**Family:** Compositae

**Names:** By Foot, felon herb, St. John's Plant, Maiden Wort, Mother's wort, womb's wort, Mugwurz, powerwort, solstice girdle, thorwort; Echter Beifuss, Mugwurz, Gánsekraut, Belfuss, Beifuß (German); armoise, armoise commune, herbe de St. Jean, Ceinture de Saint-Jean (French); artemisia, assenzio, amarelle, erba di San Giovanni, amarelle, campaccio, assenzio selvatico (Italian); zona diri Johannis, Artemisa

común, ajenja, artemisia, hierba de San Juan (Spanish); Hao-shu, ai-hao, ch'i-ai, i-ts'ao, k'i-ai, chih-ts'ao, chiu-ts'ao (Chinese); bijvoet (Dutch); Harilik puju (Estonian); Berendjasef (Farsi); Pujo (Finnish); Liath lus (Gaelic); Fekete üröm, Anyafû, Taplóüröm (Hungarian); Nat (Laotian); Bylica pospolita (Polish); Gråbo (Swedish); artemisia verdaderia (Portuguese); afsantin-e-hindi (Arabic)

**Description:** A single-stemmed plant with floppy leaves. The height is up to 6 feet and a width of 1-2 feet. The flowers are tiny, red-brown, woolly, clustered on stem tips. The leaves are elongated oval, but deeply toothed on end into points; green top with fuzzy silver-white underneath, to 4 inches long. Blooms from July to August. Native to Europe and Asia and naturalized in the US

**Cultivation:** This is a perennial to Zone 2-3. It germinates in 10-24 days. Space 1 foot apart in a soil with temperature of 65-70F. Soil preferred is dry or moist and it likes nitrogen and a pH of 5-8.5. Needs full sun. Can be propagated by seed or dividing clumps. In moist garden soil, it will spread rapidly by runners. Harvest stems to be used for moxa sticks from July to September when Mugwort is flowering. Cut plants a little above the ground and hang them singly upside down to dry in an airy, shaded spot. When dry strip the leaves and flowers from the stems. Mugwort root is best dug up in November.

**Constituents:** Volatile oil containing linalool, 1,8-cineole, *B*-thujone, borneol, nerol, neryl acetate, linalyl acetate, myrcene, vulgarole, cadinenol, muurolol, spathulenol and others; Vulgarin, a sesquiterpene lactone; flavonoids: quercitin-3-glucoside, quercitin-3-

rhamnoglucoside and 5,3'-dihydroxy-3,7,4'-trimethoxyflavone; coumarin derivatives: 7,8-methylendioxy-9-methoxycoumarin; triterpenes such as 3*B*-hydroxurs-12-en-27,28-dionic acid, *B*-amyrin, *B*-sitosterol

**Actions:** bitter digestive tonic, uterine stimulant, stimulating nervine, menstrual regulator, antirheumatic, anthelmintic, anti-spasmodic, carminative, choleric, diaphoretic, diuretic, emmenagogue, orexigenic, stomachic, vermifuge

**Character:** bitter, pungent, drying, quite cold.

**Meridians/Organs affected:** liver, spleen, kidneys

**History:** Once known in Europe as the Mother of Herbs or *Mater Herbarum*, mugwort appears in ancient lore long before Dioscorides praised it in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. It was one of the 9 healing herbs of the Anglo-Saxons and is thought to be the girdle worn by St. John the Baptist in the Bible. When black tea prices rose in early-19<sup>th</sup>-century Cornwall, England, it became a popular tea. Roman centurians reputedly placed it in their sandals to keep the soles of their feet in good shape. The origins of its name appear to be as confused as the intoxicated state mugwort produces. Some suggest it originated with *mygge*, meaning “midge”—any small insect, such as a gnat—or with the old English *magat*, or “maggot.” However, it is the wool moth that mugwort deters, and a better possibility would be *mothe*, Anglo-Saxon for “moth.” On the other hand, a few authors claim it comes from the Irish *mugan*, a mug that holds beer—mugwort beer. Dioscorides recounted that the goddess Artemis (who inspired the plant’s genus name) was believed to give succor to women in childbirth. A 13<sup>th</sup> century Welsh herbal *The Physicians of Myddfai* recommended “If a woman be unable to give birth to her child let the mugwort be bound to her left thigh. Let it be instantly removed when she has been delivered, lest there should be haemorrhage.” An 18<sup>th</sup> century Spanish herbalist, Diego de Torres, recommended the

application of a mugwort plaster below the navel as an effective method of inducing labor.

In Poland, Mugwort collected from nine different fields would increase a woman’s fertility. A baby was bathed in mugwort and thyme in order to give the child strength. It was tucked in the eaves of the house in order to protect it against “uncleanliness” on St. John’s Eve. Both mugwort and wormwood were placed in the coffin in the belief that it would delay decomposition of the body. A few long branches were sprinkled with sour milk and hung from a beam generally near the ceiling of the house. The flies then clustered on the branch and stopped plaguing the inhabitants. When enough flies had settled on the branch, two people cautiously approached it with an open sack and captured the insects. The sack would then be taken outside and disposed of. Villagers wiped their hands in mugwort in order to keep the bees from stinging.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and into modern times, European practitioners used mugwort almost exclusively as a woman’s remedy. A few who describe the healing properties are Hildegard of Bingen, Paracelsus and Culpepper. It was used to increase fertility, ease birth, stimulate the afterbirth, alleviate menstrual pains and balance menstrual irregularities. Mugwort is included in the bunch of herbs offered for Mary’s blessing on the Day of the Assumption in the southern Catholic regions of Germany. Some people burn Mugwort as incense in the stables on Assumption Day to protect the animals from disease. The name “by foot” comes from the belief that when bound to the legs it takes away the tiredness of travelers. One other intriguing sentiment about Mugwort is that it can aid in the magick of criminal detection. A “superstition” exists that in Japan, placing a cone of Moxa in the footprint of a thief would cause the thief to get a “hot foot”, that is he would feel a burning sensation as if the cone were on his foot.

During the Middle Ages, Russian physicians used it against epilepsy, while the Mongols massaged it into their calves to prevent cramping and muscle fatigue caused by

horseback riding for a long time. During this time in all Northern European countries, on the feast day of St. John, dancers would leap around a fire wearing a crown made from mugwort to protect them from disease during the coming year. The French name *armoise* is taken from the Greek goddess Artemis who represents the emancipated woman.

*Language of Flowers:* Happiness, tranquility, travel, "be not weary"

**Medicinal Uses:** A digestive and tonic herb, mugwort has a wide variety of traditional uses. Milder in action than most other *Artemisia* species, it can be taken over the long term at a low dose to improve appetite, digestive function, promotes liver detoxification and absorption of nutrients. In addition to encouraging the elimination of worms, mugwort increases bile flow. Mugwort has long been used in the West to promote menstruation (yet is found in Chinese formulas to prevent miscarriage). Use a standard infusion of two teaspoons per cup of water steeped for 20 minutes, take ¼ cup four times a day. A tea or compress was used to speed labor and help expel the afterbirth. Mugwort decreases external inflammation and, in both China and Europe, a poultice is traditionally placed on rheumatic and arthritic pains. In Russia, it is extracted in vodka for swellings, wounds, and various skin problems. It is also a fairly effective poison oak treatment. Mugwort is also an antiseptic and has been used in the treatment of malaria.

Mugwort is known to serve as substitute for tobacco, bearing the folk name, "Sailor's Tobacco". Likewise, it has been considered as a substitute for cannabis, in the sense that it has very mild relaxing, rather than inebriating properties, and the ability to offset symptoms of withdrawals from various substances of abuse. It is often cited as a herbal treatment for opium addiction. Additionally, it tends to have aromatic properties when burned that are reminiscent of cannabis when burned, therefore adding to its potential as a cannabis substitute.

It makes a good foot bath for tired feet and legs. Cleansing to the liver, it promotes digestion. Mugwort is an emmenagogue, especially when combined with pennyroyal, blue cohosh, or angelica root. It is helpful in epilepsy, palsy, and hysteria and is useful for fevers.

*TCM:* Indications: blood in vomit, sputum and stool; nosebleeds; menorrhagia (vaginal bleeding): excess menses, bleeding during pregnancy; dysmenorrhoea. Dosage 5-10 g It is also used in TCM to stop excessive menstrual bleeding caused by deficiency and coldness, circulates the blood, warms the womb, pacifies the fetus and alleviates abdominal pains caused by coldness. The Chinese used their native mugwort for nausea and roll the fuzzy leaves into *moxa* cones for an acupuncture treatment that penetrates with heat instead of needles.

*Remedies:* Infusion of the aerial parts is taken for menopausal syndrome or use as a bitter to cool the digestive tract in fever management  
*Decoction:* combine 5 grams with an equal amount of dry ginger to make a warming tea for menstrual pain.

*Tincture:* mugwort root, grain spirit or vodka. Fill a small dark mason jar halfway with freshly crushed mugwort root. Cover the root with the alcohol, close the jar, and let it steep for 2 or 3 weeks; shake it occasionally. Strain the tincture into dark dropper bottles. A daily dose is 3 to 5 drops administered 3 times daily. Take for menstrual pain, scanty menstruation, and prolonged bleeding. Use as a stimulant in liver stagnation and sluggish digestion. In childbirth it is used for prolonged labor and retained placenta

*Mugwort Footbath:* 2 handfuls mugwort herb, dried or fresh and 2 quarts cold water. Bring the herbs and the cold water to a boil in a covered pot, reduce the heat, and let it simmer for 5 minutes. Strain the liquid into a bucket or large bowl, adding more hot water as needed. Administer hot mugwort footbaths for disorders

of the pelvic organs, tension, cold feet and headaches. Cold footbaths are used for swollen and tired feet. For this purpose, let the brew cool before adding cold water.

*Mugwort Oil:* fresh mugwort, cold-pressed sunflower oil, essential oil of Scots pine. Fill a mason jar with chopped mugwort leaves, flowers, and roots. Add sunflower oil to cover and close the jar. Place it in a warm, sunny spot for 2 or 3 weeks. Strain the oil into another jar, adding 15 drops of essential oil of Scots pine for every pint of oil. Shake the mixture well before transferring it to dark bottles. This oil makes an excellent rub for swollen, tired feet and for sore or tense muscles  
*Mugwort Sleeping Pillow:* Make a pillow of dried mugwort flowers and leaves to use for insomnia and muscle cramps. In a child's pillow use one-third dried chamomile flowers.

**FLOWER ESSENCE:** Mugwort enhances the receptive quality of the psyche, allowing greater awareness of dreams, so that the Self can gain insight about the affairs of daily life and can access guidance and direction from the spiritual world. The essence particularly helps the soul to navigate within the flow of psychic life, so that it is neither lost nor overwhelmed. It helps to balance transitions between day and night consciousness, assisting the individual to remain connected in a healthy way with the practical and physical world. Mugwort helps to direct the psychic life into its proper sphere, gradually opening the soul to expanded consciousness.

**HOMEOPATHIC:** Homeopaths use *Artemisia vulgaris* for petit mal epilepsy, somnambulism, profuse perspiration that smells like garlic and dizziness caused by colored lights. It is especially effective when given with wine.

**Aromatherapy Uses :**  
**EXTRACTION:** essential oil by steam distillation from the leaves and flowering tops

**CHARACTERISTICS:** A colorless or pale yellow liquid with a powerful camphoraceous, bitter-sweet herbaceous odor.

**BLENDS WELL WITH:** oakmoss, patchouli, rosemary, lavandin, pine, sage, clary sage and cedarwood

**USES:** a fragrance component in soaps, colognes and perfumes. Limited use in flavoring due to toxic levels of thujone

**Household Uses:** When laid among clothing, mugwort repels moths. Mugwort sleep pillows have been used for centuries to induce dreams.

**Ritual Uses:** Mugwort is prominent among many women's covens to express adoration of the goddess Diana. It is said to protect travelers from fatigue, sunstroke, wild animals, and evil spirits. When cleaning a child's room, mugwort water might be asperged to protect one's children. When your home is battered by a storm or when your life feels threatened by impending danger, it is believed that dried mugwort should be tossed into the hearth fire to keep you safe. A crown of it is worn at Midsummer. It is also used as a bathing herb prior to the shortest night offering many blessings. Bunches of dried mugwort from the previous year's harvest may be tossed into the Midsummer fire. A tea or a pillow of it brings vivid prophetic dreams and helps one to contact the astral realm. Use the tea and incense to help in scrying. Mugwort is used in magick to activate instruments of divination- crystal balls and magic mirror- although it is sometimes phrased that the role of Mugwort is to "cleanse" the instrument. Mugwort's most striking claim to fame being magnetic in character, however, is that it is often known as "compass plant", owing to the fact that it's leaves tend to arrange themselves with the North-South lines of the earth's magnetic field. Worn as an amulet, the herb's root bestowed strength and health.

**Toxicity:** Avoid large amounts or continued consumption which can adversely affect the nervous system. Don't use while pregnant

**Culinary Uses:** Although mugwort is very bitter, it finds its way into European stuffings and dumplings. It is a traditional spice for roast goose and other fatty meats because it helps digestion. In Germany, it has flavored sausage for centuries. The Japanese eat the boiled young shoots in spring and flavor rice cakes and a rice-type patty called *mochi* with mugwort. Sheep eat it, and mugwort may have been the “Artemesia of Ponatos” that the ancients fed them. Mugwort serves as a bitter and a clarifying agent in beer. It was still flavoring English countryside brews well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mugwort is a welcome addition to potato soup, bean stew, cabbage dishes, sauces and gravy, meat, fish, and mushrooms.

### **Recipes:**

#### **Ginseng-Mugwort Leaves Tea**

5 grams fibrous ginsengs

¾ Tbsp mugwort leaves

½ Tbsp crystal sugar

Place the ginseng and mugwort leaves in a filter bag and rinse. Place the herbs and 1 cup water in a pot, bring to a boil over high heat. Turn the heat low and simmer for 1 minute. Remove the filter bag. Add sugar and stir until dissolved. Serve. (Effective for early stage of coronary sclerosis, arrhythmia, heart failure, anemia and shock.) (Chinese Herb Cooking for Health).

#### **Potato Stuffing**

(stuffing for a 5 lb goose)

3 or 4 medium potatoes, peeled

1 large onion, diced

3 Tbsp butter or margarine

¼ cup fresh parsley, chopped

½ tsp salt

½ tsp pepper

1 tsp crumbled, dried mugwort leaves

¼ lb bulk sausage (optional)

Place potatoes in medium saucepan, cover with water. Add salt and bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and cook gently 20 to 30 minutes, or until tender. Drain, cover with paper towel. Meanwhile, melt butter in skillet. Add onion and cook until tender. (If using

sausage, remove onions from skillet and cook sausage until brown and crumbly. Drain) Mash or dice potatoes, add onion/sausage, pepper, parsley and dried mugwort leaves. Additional mugwort can be added if desired. (Texas Gardener's Guide to Growing & Using Herbs)

#### **Macaroni with pancetta & Mugwort**

pasta (Macaroni or Penne)

4 oz parmesan cheese

4 tbsp butter

1/2 lb pancetta (or smoked bacon)

4 oz mugwort leaves

1 onion

salt & pepper to taste

Chop the bacon, onion and mugwort finely. Melt the butter on a very low flame and add the chopped ingredients and stir them into the butter - keep the temperature low so the ingredients do not fry. Cook the pasta "al dente" then, add the sauce and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese.

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**Resources:**

Companion Plants, [www.companionplants.com](http://www.companionplants.com)  
plants  
Crimson Sage, <http://www.crimson-sage.com>  
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