

Common Plantain

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Plantain is a common perennial herb that can often be seen growing in lawns, abandoned fields, along roadsides, industrial waste lands and most anywhere there is sufficient soil requirements to host this unobtrusive green wonder. It is a plant that is often ignored and taken for granted by the majority of humanity. God has provided this tiny wonder for our good health and healing.

This valuable plant was brought to the American continent by European settlers who treasured it for its many medicinal and culinary uses. There are two types of plantain, one with broad leaves (*Plantago major*) and one with narrow leaves (*Plantago lanceolata*). Both have the same virtues and healing properties and can be used interchangeably.

Plantain grows from early spring to late fall and can even be seen throughout the winter months in areas where temperatures are mild. I have seen this plant under the snows of winter on golf courses, in lawns and along the borders of woodlands.

The leaves, roots, seeds and flower spikes of plantain are used for their healing properties and even as an emergency food. The leaves are most often used and can be eaten raw or cooked, used fresh or dried as a tea or tincture and put on the skin as a poultice, fomentation or salve.

According to Bradford Angier, "*Plantain leaves make excellent greens. Fact is, the greener they are the richer they are in vitamins A and C and in minerals. They are good boiled...start them in a minimum amount of boiling water and to cook them, covered, as rapidly and briefly as possible.*"

Plantain is cooling and soothing for the circulatory system, producing an overall gradual improvement in bodily functioning. This effect is most likely due to its high nutritional value; plantain is rich in calcium, iron and vitamins A and C. Plantain's phenolic compounds give it a strong antioxidant quality.

Plantain has been used all over the world to treat colds, hepatitis, infectious diseases, skin diseases, digestive irregularities, respiratory problems, reproductive trouble, fevers and circulatory diseases. Plantain can be characterized as anti-inflammatory, antiviral, analgesic, antioxidant, anti-tumor, anti-cancer, anti-fever, anti-hypertensive, detoxifier and immune modulator.

According to herbalist Maria Treben, "*Primarily Plantain is used for all disorders of the respiratory organs, especially phlegm in the lungs, whooping cough, bronchial asthma, even for tuberculosis of the lungs.*" Treben claims to have used it to heal bronchial asthma combined with equal parts of Thyme. She recommended it as a treatment for liver and bladder disorders, bronchitis, wounds, lump protrusions, poisoned bites or stings from insects, bites from dogs or snakes, goiter, malignant growths, glandular disorders,



thrombosis and open sores, regardless of the age of the wound. Treben boldly asserts that, “*Even malignant growths disappear if treated with fresh, crushed leaves. They are also beneficial for malignant glandular disorders.*”

Plantain leaves are excellent for poisonous bites and stings, since it helps draw out the poison within a very short period of time. Plantain may be used to draw out splinters of all kinds with good effect. This amazing plant can also help relieve blood poisoning and infection. According to eminent herbalist Doctor Christopher, “*It is the best herb for blood poisoning: reducing the swelling and completely healing a limb where poisoning has made amputation imminent.*”

When plantain leaves are used fresh, made into a poultice, salve or ointment and used on irritated skin they soothe and soften the skin. Plantain leaves can be used for any type of pimple, ulcer, boil, cut, scratch, burn or other skin inflammation. If using fresh leaves, simply crush them by hand or chew lightly with your mouth and fasten the leaves onto the irritation and you will feel soothing relief in a short period of time.

Knowledge of plantain is indispensable for rural and urban dwellers who wish to improve overall well-being and get themselves out of many delicate health related situations. Get out there and familiarize yourself with this important little plant today and learn how to use it properly. It can help someone in need and that person may just be yourself or one of your family members.

Glenn Cronick is a Master Herbalist. He teaches high school Latin and English literature. In his spare time he enjoys gardening and hiking.