

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 58

Burdock

Description

Great burdock, *Arctium lappa*, is a coarse biennial herb native to Europe and Asia and brought to North America by European settlers. It is valued by herbalists but is a weed to gardeners since it grows as tall as 9 ft. (3 m) in its second year.

Burdock has a deep tap root producing a large rosette of basal leaves in the first year, growing as large as 1.5 ft. (0.45m) wide. In its second year, burdock shoots up a sturdy, grooved, multi-branched stem. Each has a purple hue at the base that extends up the stalk and into the leaf veins. Stalks of great burdock are not hollow while common burdock is.

Leaves are similar to rhubarb leaves in that they are dark green on top with downy, pale green on the underside. Flower heads are round and thistle-like, with numerous small, purple-hued, funnel-shaped blooms in mid summer to early fall. Blossoms are surrounded by stiff, prickly, hook-tipped burrs that grasp and hold firmly to clothing and fur.

General Use

Traditionally being used as a blood purifier by promoting perspiration and releasing toxins from the body, burdock is helpful for cleaning up skin conditions such as psoriasis and dry, scaly eczema.

For some people, it may bring relief in cases of chronic arthritis and help reduce blood-sugar levels. It works best when used over a long period of time.

Other herbalists use burdock root as a treatment for cancer. Oil known as *Repeinoe maslo*, over six to eight months, is said to stimulate new hair growth, and a poultice

from fresh leaves applied to the forehead was used to relieve headaches.

Preparations

First-year tap roots are harvested in the early fall. Roots are deep and may be difficult to extract. The leaves are best when fresh and before flowering because they turn bitter when dried. Dried roots can be used as a decoction, leaves as a poultice and roots as an addition to salads and stir fries.

Decoction: Add about 1 teaspoon of thinly sliced fresh or dried root per 8 oz. of water. In a glass or ceramic pot, bring to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer for about 20 minutes. Drink up to 3 cups daily.

Poultice: Simmer fresh, chopped burdock leaves for 5 minutes maximum. Drain, squeezing out liquid. Cool until warm. Apply to affected area, and secure with a clean cloth or gauze. A little oil applied to the skin first may prevent the poultice from sticking when dry. Prepare a fresh batch every few hours until relieved.

Tincture: In a glass container, combine 1 part fresh herb to 3 parts alcohol (50% alcohol-water solution). Set aside in a dark place. Shake daily for 2 weeks. Strain through cheesecloth, and store in a dark bottle. It will remain potent for 2 years. Standard dosage is ½ teaspoon 3 times daily.

Precaution

Pregnant women should not use burdock as it is reported to be a uterine stimulant and has been known to cause abortion.

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