

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 59

St. John's Wort

St. John's wort, also known as *Hypericum perforatum*, is a perennial herb usually discarded as a weed. This weed contains greater values than the eye can see.

Perforatum is Latin for "perforated."

When held in the light, the leaves reveal translucent dots, giving the impression that the leaf is perforated. These dots are layers of clear essential plant oil and resin.

Description and Habitat

St. John's wort grows 1 to 2 feet high in uncultivated ground: meadows, roadsides, woods, and hedges. The erect stems have two raised lines, making the stems appear flat. The plants have slender leaves and bright, five-petaled, yellow flowers.

In North America this plant is commonly known as the Klamath weed. To properly identify this plant, refer to the book *Ontario Weeds*.

Harvesting

The highest-concentration area of the plant used for remedies is the flowering tops just before they develop seeds. The leaves and stems also contain healing properties, but they are not as strong as in the flowering tops.

Harvesting can be done by hand. Contact with skin or eyes should be avoided. Harvested material is usually laid out in the sun for drying to retain the color and quality.

Uses

St. John's wort has recently become a very popular herb, mostly due to its anti-depressant properties. Less-known qualities,

but still valuable, are its antiseptic, pain-killing, and anti-viral effects.

For external use, St. John's wort can be made into an ointment for bruises, wounds, burns, hemorrhoids, sunburn, herpes sores, varicose veins, nerve pain, and sciatica. The oil can be rubbed on areas affected by arthritis and rheumatism.

For internal uses, St. John's wort is believed to be beneficial for symptoms of depression, anxiety, persistent cough, digestion, bronchial problems, diarrhea, menstrual problems, fatigue, flu, gout, insomnia, irritability, and ulcers.

As an anti-depressant, it may take some time when used regularly for any effects to be noticed.

A tea can be made for any of the internal symptoms using leaves or flowers.

Side Effects

Before considering St. John's wort as a remedy, you must be aware of the precautions. A study has shown that it may interfere with some of the drugs used in cases of HIV and immune-system suppression. Please consult your health care practitioner before taking any medication containing St. John's wort.

Side effects that have also been reported include photosensitivity, a mild nauseating feeling that usually corrects itself after a few weeks of taking the medicine.

St. John's wort can be very beneficial in treating ailments but only if taken correctly.

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