



Plants For A Future

*Edible, medicinal and useful plants
for a healthier world*

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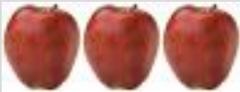
Database Name:

Inula helenium - L.

Keyword:

Elecampane

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Author	L.	Botanical references	17, 200
Family	Compositae	Genus	Inula
Synonyms			
Known Hazards	None known		
Range	S.E. Europe. Naturalized in Britain.		
Habitat	Fields, waysides, waste places, copses etc[17], often on moist soils in shade[4].		
Edibility Rating	 3 (1-5)	Medicinal Rating	 3 (1-5)

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Perennial growing to 1.5m by 1m.

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It is hardy to zone 5. It is in flower from July to August, and the seeds ripen from August to September. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs) and are pollinated by Bees, Lepidoptera (Moths & Butterflies). The plant is self-fertile.

The plant prefers light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils. It can grow in semi-shade (light woodland) or no shade. It requires moist soil. The plant can tolerate strong winds but not maritime exposure.

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Woodland Garden; Sunny Edge; Dappled Shade; Meadow;

Edible Uses

Edible Parts: [Leaves](#); [Root](#).

Leaves - cooked. Rather bitter and aromatic[115], they were used as a potherb by the ancient Romans[183] but are rarely used at present. Root - candied and eaten as a sweetmeat[4, 7, 27, 105, 183]. It contains up to 44% inulin[46, 240]. Inulin is a starch that cannot be digested by humans. It usually passes straight through the digestive system, though it can ferment and cause wind problems for some people[K]. Inulin can be converted into a sugar that is suitable for diabetics to eat[238].

Medicinal Uses

[Alterative](#); [Anthelmintic](#); [Antiseptic](#); [Antitussive](#); [Astringent](#); [Bitter](#); [Cholagogue](#); [Demulcent](#); [Diaphoretic](#); [Diuretic](#); [Expectorant](#); [Stimulant](#); [Stomachic](#); [Tonic](#).

Elecampane has a long history of use as a medicinal herb. A gently warming and tonic herb, it is especially effective in treating coughs, consumption, bronchitis and many other complaints of the chest as well as disorders of the digestive system[4, 9, 254]. A very safe herb to use, it is suitable for the old and the young and especially useful when the patient is debilitated[254]. It cleanses toxins from the body, stimulating the immune and digestive systems and treating bacterial and fungal infections[238]. The root is alterative, anthelmintic, antiseptic, astringent, bitter, cholagogue, demulcent, diaphoretic, diuretic, mildly expectorant, gently stimulant, stomachic, tonic[4, 7, 9, 21, 46, 165, 200, 218, 222]. It is best harvested in the autumn from plants that are two years old, and it can be dried for later use [4]. The roots should be at least 3 years old according to another report[7]. This remedy should not be prescribed for pregnant women [238]. An extract of the plant is a powerful antiseptic and bactericide, particularly effective against the organism that causes TB[213, 238]. The root contains alantolactone, which is strongly anthelmintic. In a 1:1000 dilution it kills the parasitic worm *Ascaris* in 16 hours[218]. Alantolactone has an anti-inflammatory action, it also reduces mucous secretions and stimulates the immune system[254]. The plant is sometimes recommended as an external wash for skin inflammations and varicose ulcers, but has been known to cause allergic reactions[238].

Other Uses

[Dye](#); [Essential](#).

A blue dye is obtained from the bruised and macerated root mixed with ashes and whortleberries (*Vaccinium myrtillus*)[4, 46, 61]. The root yields up to 2% of a camphor-scented essential oil, this is used

as a flavouring and medicinally[46, 61, 238].

Scented Plants

Root: Crushed Dried

When first dug up, the roots smell like ripe bananas, but as they dry they take on the scent of violets.

Cultivation details

An easily grown plant, it grows well in moist shady positions in ordinary garden soil, though it grows best in a good loamy soil[4]. Succeeds in an ordinary garden soil in a sunny position[1]. Plants are also tolerant of considerable neglect, succeeding on our Cornwall trial ground even when left unweeded for four years[K]. Elecampane has a long history of cultivation as a medicinal herb, though it is not commonly grown nowadays[4]. When first dug up, the roots smell like ripe bananas, but as they dry they take on the scent of violets [245].

Propagation

Seed - sow in spring or autumn in a cold frame[4]. When they are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and plant them out in the summer. If you have sufficient seed, it could be worthwhile trying an outdoor sowing in situ in the spring. Division in spring or autumn[111]. Fairly small pieces of root can be used, so long as each piece has a growth bud on it[4]. Very easy, larger clumps can be replanted direct into their permanent positions, though it is best to pot up smaller clumps and grow them on in a cold frame until they are rooting well. Plant them out in the spring. Root cuttings in winter. Cut sections of root about 5cm long, place them in a warm greenhouse over the winter and they should grow away vigorously[4].

Links

References

[K] Ken Fern

Notes from observations, tasting etc at Plants For A Future and on field trips.

[1] **F. Chittendon.** *RHS Dictionary of Plants plus Supplement.* 1956 Oxford University Press 1951

Comprehensive listing of species and how to grow them. Somewhat outdated, it has been replaced in 1992 by a new dictionary (see [200]).

[4] **Grieve.** *A Modern Herbal.* Penguin 1984 ISBN 0-14-046-440-9 Not so modern (1930's?) but lots of information, mainly temperate plants.

[7] **Chiej. R.** *Encyclopaedia of Medicinal Plants*. MacDonald 1984
ISBN 0-356-10541-5

Covers plants growing in Europe. Also gives other interesting information on the plants. Good photographs.

[9] **Launert. E.** *Edible and Medicinal Plants*. Hamlyn 1981 ISBN 0-600-37216-2

Covers plants in Europe. a drawing of each plant, quite a bit of interesting information.

[17] **Clapham, Tootin and Warburg.** *Flora of the British Isles*. Cambridge University Press 1962

A very comprehensive flora, the standard reference book but it has no pictures.

[21] **Lust. J.** *The Herb Book*. Bantam books 1983 ISBN 0-553-23827-2

Lots of information tightly crammed into a fairly small book.

[27] **Vilmorin. A.** *The Vegetable Garden*. Ten Speed Press 0 ISBN 0-89815-041-8

A reprint of a nineteenth century classic, giving details of vegetable varieties. Not really that informative though.

[46] **Uphof. J. C. Th.** *Dictionary of Economic Plants*. Weinheim 1959

An excellent and very comprehensive guide but it only gives very short descriptions of the uses without any details of how to utilize the plants. Not for the casual reader.

[61] **Usher. G.** *A Dictionary of Plants Used by Man*. Constable 1974
ISBN 0094579202

Forget the sexist title, this is one of the best books on the subject. Lists a very extensive range of useful plants from around the world with very brief details of the uses. Not for the casual reader.

[105] **Tanaka. T.** *Tanaka's Cyclopaedia of Edible Plants of the World*. Keigaku Publishing 1976

The most comprehensive guide to edible plants I've come across. Only the briefest entry for each species, though, and some of the entries are more than a little dubious. Not for the casual reader.

[111] **Sanders. T. W.** *Popular Hardy Perennials*. Collingridge 1926

A fairly wide range of perennial plants that can be grown in Britain and how to grow them.

[115] **Johnson. C. P.** *The Useful Plants of Great Britain*. 0

Written about a hundred years ago, but still a very good guide to the useful plants of Britain.

[165] **Mills. S. Y.** *The Dictionary of Modern Herbalism*. 0

An excellent small herbal.

[183] **Facciola. S.** *Cornucopia - A Source Book of Edible Plants*.

Kampong Publications 1990 ISBN 0-9628087-0-9

Excellent. Contains a very wide range of conventional and

unconventional food plants (including tropical) and where they can be obtained (mainly N. American nurseries but also research institutes and a lot of other nurseries from around the world.

[200] **Huxley. A.** *The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening.* 1992. MacMillan Press 1992 ISBN 0-333-47494-5

Excellent and very comprehensive, though it contains a number of silly mistakes. Readable yet also very detailed.

[213] **Weiner. M. A.** *Earth Medicine, Earth Food.* Ballantine Books 1980 ISBN 0-449-90589-6

A nice book to read though it is difficult to look up individual plants since the book is divided into separate sections dealing with the different medicinal uses plus a section on edible plants. Common names are used instead of botanical.

[218] **Duke. J. A. and Ayensu. E. S.** *Medicinal Plants of China* Reference Publications, Inc. 1985 ISBN 0-917256-20-4

Details of over 1,200 medicinal plants of China and brief details of their uses. Often includes an analysis, or at least a list of constituents. Heavy going if you are not into the subject.

[222] **Foster. S. & Duke. J. A.** *A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants. Eastern and Central N. America.* Houghton Mifflin Co. 1990 ISBN 0395467225

A concise book dealing with almost 500 species. A line drawing of each plant is included plus colour photographs of about 100 species. Very good as a field guide, it only gives brief details about the plants medicinal properties.

[238] **Bown. D.** *Encyclopaedia of Herbs and their Uses.* Dorling Kindersley, London. 1995 ISBN 0-7513-020-31

A very well presented and informative book on herbs from around the globe. Plenty in it for both the casual reader and the serious student. Just one main quibble is the silly way of having two separate entries for each plant.

[240] **Chopra. R. N., Nayar. S. L. and Chopra. I. C.** *Glossary of Indian Medicinal Plants (Including the Supplement).* Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, New Delhi. 1986

Very terse details of medicinal uses of plants with a wide range of references and details of research into the plants chemistry. Not for the casual reader.

[245] **Genders. R.** *Scented Flora of the World.* Robert Hale. London. 1994 ISBN 0-7090-5440-8

An excellent, comprehensive book on scented plants giving a few other plant uses and brief cultivation details. There are no illustrations.

[254] **Chevallier. A.** *The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants* Dorling Kindersley. London 1996 ISBN 9-780751-303148

An excellent guide to over 500 of the more well known medicinal herbs from around the world.

Readers Comments

Inula helenium

Goran Budija Tue Mar 29 06:41:50 2005

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