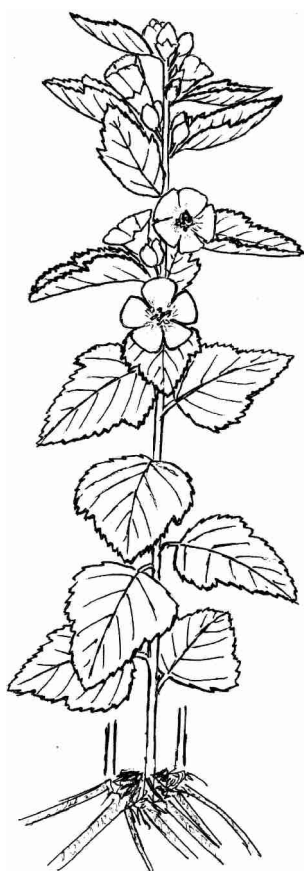


*Wild Foods and Medicines of Forest Garden Transylvania*  
By Mark Jack

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## Introduction



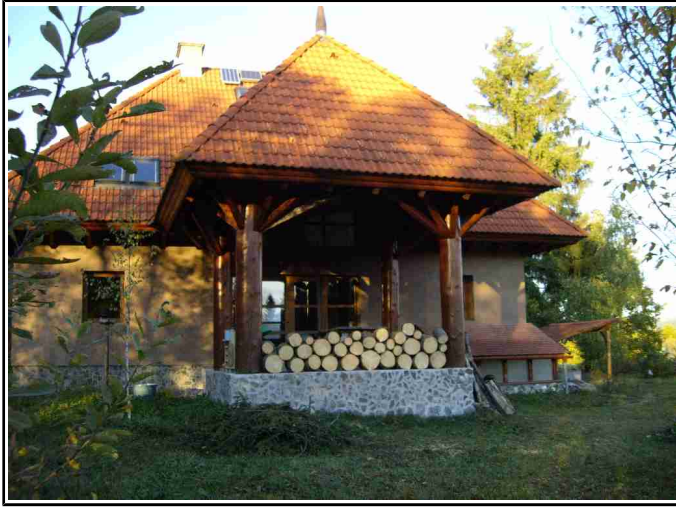
Welcome to *Wild Foods and Medicines of Forest Garden Transylvania*. In it you will find a selection of the plants that grow around Forest Garden Transylvania and any food or medicinal uses they may have. With these entries there are photos and notes to aid in the plant's identification and, where applicable, my experiences in trying the plants. I also have included a *How to Use the Herbs* section which contains detailed instructions on how to make several different herbal products. If you are interested in where the information on the plants comes from or you are interested in good books or internet sites for looking up herbs, the information is referenced and a list of references can be found at the end of this document.

Instead of giving detailed botanical descriptions for each herb, which would get a bit technical and would require a large glossary, I have, for the plants that have uses, included helpful identification notes. These, with the aid of the picture, should be enough to quite accurately identify the plants while at Forest Garden Transylvania. As a word of caution however, don't try and identify a plant based on a picture alone, it is too easy to make a mistake. To be really sure of a plant's identification a plant identification book is strongly recommended.

I hope you find this guide useful and enjoyable. It does not contain all of the plants at Forest Garden Transylvania, as there are literally hundreds of them, but it contains a lot to get you started on, and perhaps you may be able to add some of your own to this list!

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** What is written here is for interest purposes only and not as a replacement for proper medical advice or treatment. If you are ill go and see a doctor or a fully qualified herbalist, preferably both! Herbs can interact with some drugs, be not suitable for some people (especially those who are pregnant), or occasionally have some side effects. Also, as I have included most of the uses of the herbs studied that I came across in my research (so as to give the broadest range of possibilities), this means that some of the herbs might have been stated as being good for something when actually something else might be much better. To find out the best herbs for you it is much better to go and see a herbalist than to try figuring something out from a book. So think of this more as an appetiser; as an interesting guide to many of the wonderful plants at Forest Garden Transylvania, and of potential ways they could assist us in our health.

## About Forest Garden Transylvania



Forest Garden  
Transylvania.

*Permaculture in the Wilderness.*

'Forest Garden Transylvania' is a community based education centre designed on principles of permaculture design and sustainable community development to protect the unique biodiversity of the Carpathian Mountain Wilderness of Eastern Europe.



To find out more about Forest Garden Transylvania and the wonderful opportunities you could have there, visit  
<http://www.forestgardentransylvania.org/>

## About the Author



Mark is passionate about life, nature, health and human development. After graduating from university where he studied Herbal Medicine, he left the UK to spend a year and a half living in the wilds of Transylvania, learning more about the practicalities of living in a sustainable way and developing a deeper connection with the natural world and with medicinal plants. To find out more about what he is currently up to visit <http://markjack.co.uk>.

## How to Use the Herbs

There are many different ways of using herbs, enough to fill a large book, so here I will just give instructions on how to make the the main ones mentioned in the text.

### Infusions

This basically just means making a tea, and it is used for herbs of which you use the leaves.

1. Boil some water.
2. Put the dried herb in a container such as a pot or a cup.
3. Pour boiled water over the herbs.
4. Cover the container (this is important to stop essential oils escaping with the steam).
5. Leave for 10 to 15 minutes.
6. Strain and drink.

### Decoctions

This is similar to making a tea, but because it is normally for harder things like bark or roots they need to be simmered to get all the goodness out. While it is probably best to make the decoctions fresh each time, enough can be made for a whole day at once and drunk throughout the day.

1. Boil some water in a pan and add the herbs.
2. Turn the heat low so that the herb is being gently simmered and put a lid on it.
3. Leave for 10 to 15 minutes.
4. Strain it into cups.
5. Let it cool and then drink.

### Poultices

This is a method of applying the herb to the skin. A warm and moist preparation of the herb is put on the skin and held in place with a bandage. The most simple way of doing this is to chew the herb a bit and then bandage it on. Alternatively the herbs can be chopped and simmered in a little water briefly before being allowed to cool and put on the skin.

### Tinctures

This is an alcoholic preparation of a herb. It makes a medicine that is quick and simple to take and that lasts much longer than dried herbs. It can be made with fresh or dried herbs. I will just give the instructions for making it with fresh herbs here as it is more simple, and with a lot of herbs (especially Lemon Balm) it can be a better method as it preserves something that would get lost if the herb is dried first.

1. Collect the herb fresh right before you intend to make the tincture.
2. Chop the herb finely.
3. Fill a clean jar with the chopped herb and press it in really firmly so it is completely full.
4. Fill the jar to the rim with pure alcohol (as in 99.5% grain alcohol. Take care: it is extremely flammable, and you may need a licence or permit for it).
5. Keep the jar in the shade for two weeks shaking the jar twice each day.
6. Filter the tincture through muslin cloth and squeeze out the tincture from the herb.
7. Store in a dark, labelled bottle.

## Oils

This is a herbal infused oil. I will say how to make two different ones here. The main way to make it is to gently heat dried herbs in oil:

1. Collect and dry herbs.
2. Break the herb up as much as possible, a coarse powder is best.
3. Prepare a double boiler or water bath. The simplest way of doing this is with a milk pan that has a hollow wall: water is put in the hollow wall so that when the pan is put on heat the water between the walls starts to boil and that boiling water heats the inside pan. A small saucepan sat inside a bigger saucepan, with water in the bigger saucepan also can work. This is to stop the oil getting too hot: you don't want to deep-fry the herbs!
4. Put 5 parts oil (e.g sunflower, olive) and 1 part of the herbs in the double boiler and put it on the heat, keeping a lid over the herbs and oil.
5. Keep it on the heat for at least two hours, though nearer four hours may be better.
6. If the herb was powdered it may need 12 hours to settle before the oil is poured off, or otherwise filter off the oil.
7. Store the oil in a clean, perfectly dry, labelled glass container in a dark cool place.

NOTE: Make sure no water gets in the oil as it can make the oil go rancid.

Some herb flowers can be used fresh in making a herbal oil by a different method. St. Johns Wort is a really good example and creates a bright red oil:

1. Fill a jar full of the flowers.
2. Add sunflower oil to the jar so that the flowers are covered.
3. It may be that there are not enough flowers in one day so every day or couple of days add more flowers to the jar until plenty have been added.
4. Leave the jar in the sun and shake twice a day for 2-3 weeks.
5. Filter out the liquid into a new jar and leave for a day for it to settle.
6. Very carefully pour the clean oil off the top leaving the water and other residue at the bottom of the jar. It is better to leave some good oil in the jar than to let any of the water get into the oil that is being kept, as the water may make all the oil go rancid.
7. Store in a labelled bottle in a cool, dark, dry place.

## Ointments

This is usually made by adding a small amount of beeswax to a herbal oil to make it thicker. It is a thick oily paste that can be rubbed onto the skin:

1. Make some herbal oil as per above instructions.
2. Grate some beeswax.
3. Put aside some spare herbal oil for later.
4. Add 30grams of beeswax for every cup of oil. (A few drops of essential oils can also be added)
5. Heat it very gently while stirring until the wax melts.
6. Dip a metal spoon in the mixture and put the spoon somewhere so that it cools quickly.
7. When the spoon is cool check the result. If the ointment is too soft add more wax to the pot, if it is too hard add more oil.
8. While the ointment is still warm and runny pour it into the pots you want to use for the ointment and let it set.
9. Label the pots and store in a cool, dry and dark place.

## Creams and Lotions

A cream or lotion is a mixture of herbal oil and water. However, water and oil do not like to mix so this can be a bit tricky and it needs something else to help it. Both wax and glycerine help water and oil mix a bit and they are both easily available so I will give that recipe here. Other substances can be used to make smoother creams, but these are normally in the form of chemical substances and are a little more difficult to get. Oil and water can quickly go rancid or mouldy together so often preservatives are used to make it last. Some herbs and especially essential oils can act as mildly effective preservatives, and storing the cream in a cool place and keeping it clean will also help it last longer. Even so, don't expect it to last for many months. The following is the most successful recipe I used but it was still not perfect so you could experiment with the quantities a bit to see if it can be made better.

1. Melt 1/15<sup>th</sup> of a cup of wax in 1 cup of herbal oil in one container.
2. Mix ½ tsp of glycerine in 1 and 1/3 cups of water in another container.
3. When the oil and wax cools slightly and just starts to set around the edges vigorously whisk the water mix in with it so that it becomes creamy.
4. Essential oils can be mixed in too, and some of these can also help the cream last longer.
5. Fill containers with the cream, label it and store it in a cool, dark place.

## Syrup

Essentially making a syrup is like making a very concentrated herbal tea and mixing sugar in with it to stop it going off. The balance of sugar is very important. It has to be enough to stop bacteria breeding on it, but not too much that it crystallizes out of solution. White sugar is used because it is possible to be a lot more accurate with the amounts of sugar (brown sugar contains more than just refined, pure sugar). Other recipes using some honey can also be used but the following recipe is the one I have experience with:

1. Add cut up dried herbs to freshly boiled water making sure to use as much herbs as possible to make it strong enough.
2. After 15-30 minute sieve out the herbs and collect the infusion (tea).
3. Put the infusion in a double boiler (see entry for oils) and leave it on the heat with the lid off until ½ to 2/3 of the water has evaporated off.
4. For every 47ml of liquid add 85 grams of white sugar. The more accurate you are doing this the longer the syrup will last without preservatives.
5. Filter the syrup through a very clean fine cloth and pour the syrup into sterilized jars.
6. Label and store in a cool, dark place.



## The Plants

### Wood Anemone

Latin: *Anemone nemorosa*

Family: *Ranunculaceae*



**POISONOUS!**

**Medical Uses:** Well it is not advised to use this plant (see above!) some use has been made of it in the past by chewing the root and the resultant burning in the mouth helping to clear the head. An ointment has also been made of it for helping eye inflammation if applied to the eyelids and for cleansing a malignant or corroding ulcer [2], but I don't advise it as you might end up doing more harm than good.

Photo April 2011



## Betony

Latin: *Stachys officinalis*

Family: *Stachys*



**Botanical Note:** The leaves have rounded teeth, the lower leaves are heart-shaped at base. The leaves on the stem are in pairs opposite each other. The stem is only softly hairy.

**Edible Uses:** None found.

**Medical Uses:** Wood Betony has two main spheres of activity, helping problems of the head and of the digestion, especially when related to the nervous system (see below). The leaves are collected when just going to flower and can be used as tea or for making a tincture.

**Head:** it helps in conditions such as anxiety, insomnia, lack of concentration, forgetfulness, insanity or disordered thinking. It improves blood circulation to the head and helps headaches (when taken regularly) and other pains of the face, and head injuries. It also helps clear blocked sinuses.

**Digestion:** it is useful for weak digestion, helping the nervous system of the gut and weak gallbladder reflexes. It is useful for bloating and gas, heartburn,

colic, mild pains, diarrhoea and constipation due to weakness.

Energetically Matthew Wood [3] says that this plant is grounding, connecting and improves our gut instincts. He believes it to strengthen a person's energy field thus helping people who think they are being abducted by aliens or feel they are being possessed (this herb used to be used for demon possession in the past, which may have been what psychiatric disorders were thought in terms of in those times – this herb is good for the mind.) [3]

Photo August 2010

## Chickweed

Latin: *Stellaria media*

Family: *Stellaria*



**Botanical Note:** It is a very small plant with white flowers that have 5 petals that are split in half making it look like it has 10 petals. The leaves are only a bit bigger than the flowers. A highly identifiable feature of this plant is that there is a single line of hairs on the stem.

**Edible Uses:** The leaves and stem can be eaten, raw or cooked for 2 minutes. They can be available all year round if the winter is not too severe. They are very nutritious. The leaves contain saponins so some caution is

advised.

The seed can be ground into a powder and used in making bread or to thicken soups. It would be very fiddly to harvest any quantity of this seed since it is produced in small quantities throughout most of the year and is very small. [1,4]

**Medical Uses:** The whole plant can be used internally as a tea or tincture. It is a very nourishing plant. It heals, soothes, lubricates and cools, and so can help conditions such as sore mouth and throats, bronchitis, coughs, colds, asthma, inflammation of the stomach and bowels, arthritis, and mastitis. It helps breakdown fat in the body, regulate water and decongests the lymphatics. It may also be helpful in constipation.

Chickweed can be used externally to cool, cleanse and help heal boils, burns, rashes, outbreaks, sore eyes, eczema, mastitis, ulcers and cuts. It especially helps itching and irritation. For itching a strong infusion (tea) of fresh chickweed can be added to a bath. It can be used for drawing foreign bodies out of the body [3,5].

Photo July 2010

## Coltsfoot

Latin: *Tussilago farfara*



**Botanical Note:** The flowers are one of the first to arrive in early spring, and they flower before the leaves of it have even started to grow. The stems of the flowers are purplish with scales. The leaves when they grow are large and wide, heart-shaped at the bases, white-felted underneath and when young also whitish-green on top, becoming more green. The leaf margins are slightly lobed or toothed.

Always make sure you have seen the leaves growing where the flowers were before as Butterbur has very similar leaves and may be confused with it.

**Edible Uses:** Flower buds and young flowers can be eaten raw or cooked and they taste really good! The young leaves can also be eaten raw or cooked, however, they have a bitter taste unless they are washed after being boiled (I have yet to try this). Also the dried and burnt leaves can be used as a salt substitute. The slender rootstock can be candied in sugar syrup.

**Medical Uses:** This is a widely used plant, and is particularly good for the respiratory system, although it can be used for a few other things (see below). The leaves and flowers are used.

**Respiratory:** it is soothing and relaxing but also helps get out mucus, therefore it is very good for coughs such as an irritable cough, whooping cough, or if there is difficulty getting the mucus up. It can be supportive in cases of bronchitis, emphysema, and because it also relaxes the airways it is good for asthma (slowly increase the dose for asthma). It is also good for clearing out junk from the lungs too, such as from breathing in poor air.

**Skin (external usage):** Varicose veins, weeping ulcers, abscesses and boils.

**Urinary:** Cystitis.

**Other:** Scrofula (which is a tendency towards getting lots of inflammations from little triggers, particularly affecting the skin, lymphatics such as swollen glands, and mucous membranes). [3,5,8]

Photo April 2011



### Common Bird's-Foot Trefoil

Latin: *Lotus uliginosus*

Family: *Lotus*



**May be toxic**, similar species are although there are no reports of this one being such [1].

**Other uses:** An insecticide is obtained from the plant. No more details are given. This species is used as a pioneer plant in the reclamation of peat and pumice soils and on other wet acid soils that are unsuitable for the more commonly used *Trifolium* spp [1].

Photo August 2010

## Corn Crowsfoot

Latin: *Ranunculus arvensis*



Probably very acrid and **may be poisonous** as it is in the buttercup family

Photo June 2010

## Cowslip

Latin: *Primula veris*

Family: *Primulaceae*



**Botanical Note:** Unlike Oxlip which it looks quite similar to it has orange markings inside the flower, and the flower is fragrant. It also has a slightly smaller flower than Oxlip.

**Edible Uses:** The flowers and leaves are edible raw or cooked, however, some people can be allergic to the stamens of the flower[1].

**Medical Uses:** Cowslip is a calming, soothing nervine. Mainly just the flowers are used, with or without the green part (calyx)

depending on what it is to be used for.

The whole flower (and leaves and root can be used) is used for coughs and bronchitis.

Just the yellow part of the flower is used for migraines, headaches and vertigo; restlessness, anxiety and insomnia; kidney and bladder conditions, rheumatism and gout.

Cowslip oil can be used externally for rheumatic pains, nerve pains and weak muscles [3, 8].



### Meadow Crane's-bill

Latin: *Geranium pratense*

Family: *Geraniaceae*



**Botanical Note:** The leaves have 5-7 very jagged lobes than fan out in each direction circularly. The flowers are in pairs. The plant is a bit hairy.

**Edible Uses:** None found

**Medical Uses:** While this is not a herb I am familiar with in modern herbal practice it is said to be anti-inflammatory (this has be shown experimentally), to help with pain and is used in the treatment of fevers from influenza, inflammation of the lungs, pain and swellings of the limbs. [1]

Photo August 2010

## Spring Crocus

Latin: *Crocus vernus*

Family: *Iridaceae*



**Botanical Note:** It flowers very early in spring with its purple flower. The leaves when big enough to see are grass-shaped and have a white stripe down the middle. It has only 3 stamens (and 1 style, so if you look in the center of the plant you will see 4 parts in total sticking up, not more)

**Edible Uses:** None found.

**Medical Uses:** None found.

Photo April 2011

## Dog-violet

Latin: *Viola riviniana*

Family: *Violaceae*



**Botanical Note:** There are several types of Dog-violet but the differences between them are very small.

**Edible Uses:** The leaves and flowers can be eaten raw or cooked and can help thicken soup – and this seems to apply to most Dog-violets [1].

**Medical Uses:** It may have a laxative effect and help induce vomiting (this might apply just to the root [3]), it may also help with skin diseases. However this may not

apply to all types of Dog-violet if at all and so I can not say anything with certainty about this plant's medicinal uses [1, 2].

Photo April 2011



## Dropwort

Latin: *Filipendula vulgaris*



**Botanical Note:** The flowers are cream, 8-16mm big each, and sometimes have some pink/purple on them. The leaves can not be seen clearly on the picture on the left as there is another plant behind it. The leaves are in the picture below and look jagged and are a bit like a fern leaf. This plant is closely related to Meadowsweet, but the flowers of Meadowsweet are half the size.



*NOTE: There is a plant called Water Dropwort, it is a completely different plant and is poisonous, only the names are similar.*

**Edible Uses:** Young leaves can be eaten raw or cooked. The root can be eaten raw or cooked but is rather bitter and is best if roasted. It has been used as a famine food in times of scarcity [1]

**Medical Uses:** This is not to my knowledge a commonly used herb at present, however it may be beneficial in helping treat kidney and bladder stones (possibly moreso the root), genital discharges and intestinal worms (also probably root) [1]. According to Culpepper it is a good remedy for kidney affections and all the diseases of the lungs, such as shortness of breath, wheezing (maybe because it reduces spasm – is antispasmodic), hoarseness of the throat; and to get rid of tough phlegm [1, 2].

Photo June 2010

## Globeflower

Latin: *Trollius europaeus*

Family: Ranunculaceae



**POISONOUS!**

Photo June 2010

## Guelder Rose / Cramp Bark

Latin: *Viburnum opulus*

Family: *Caprifoliaceae*



**Botanical Note:** This bush is very distinguishable by the flowers, which are white, have 5 petals and are in large flat-topped clusters with small flowers in the middle surrounded by a ring of large flowers at the edge.

**Edible Uses:** Although edible, the berries are too bitter to be palatable eaten fresh off the trees (this I can confirm!). In Siberia the berries used to be fermented with flour and a spirit distilled from them. They have been used in Norway and Sweden to flavour a paste of honey and flour. In Canada are used as a substitute for

Cranberries and for making a piquant jelly [1].

**Medical Uses:** As its other name, Cramp Bark, suggests, the bark of this bush is used mainly for all sorts of muscle cramps or spasms: it can help relax muscle tension and cramps, it can help period pains (dysmenorrhea) by relaxing the muscles of the womb and in a similar way protect against threatened miscarriage, it can help in asthma by relaxing the airways, it can help stomach cramps and colicky pain, and by relaxing tension in the arteries may help with some migraines and hypertension.

Other properties of Guelder Rose include helping reduce excessive menstrual bleeding or irregular bleeding during menopause and being mildly sedative and so helping with nervous conditions such as nervous indigestion or bowel problems.

It can be taken as a decoction or as a tincture [1, 5, 6]

Photo August 2010



## Harebell

Latin: *Campanula rotundifolia*

Family: *Campanulaceae*



Photo June 2010

**Botanical Note:** What distinguishes this bellflower from most other bellflowers is that the leaves are long and thin like grass. To me it seems very similar to Peach-leaved Bellflower (*C. persicifolia*) so it is possible I could be mistaken.

**Edible Uses:** The leaves can be eaten raw or cooked. All parts of the similar looking bellflower (see botanical description) are also edible so either way you can eat the leaves [1].

**Medical Uses:** This plant is not commonly used to my knowledge, however, it has been said that the root can be chewed in the treatment of heart and lung problems, though it is unclear what those problems may be. An infusion of the roots can be used as ear drops for a sore ear and a decoction of the plant can be drunk or used as a wash in the treatment of sore eyes [1]. The other similar looking bellflower does not have any uses that I can find.

## Knapweed

Latin: *Centaurea*



**Botanical Note:** There are several different types of Knapweed, unfortunately I haven't been able to tell which one this is.

**Edible Uses:** None found

**Medical Uses:** Some types of knapweed have medicinal uses, however the specific type of this knapweed needs to be identified before knowing how it may be useful.

Photo June 2010

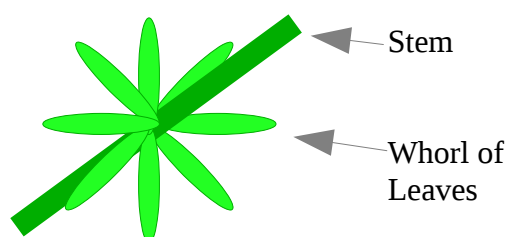
## Lady's Bedstraw

Latin: *Galium verum*

Family: *Galium*



**Botanical Note:** The leaves of this plant come out of the stem in whorls of 8-12 leaves together (see diagram below). The stem has four rows of hairs on it.



**Edible Uses:** The leaves can be eaten raw or cooked. The seed is said to be edible and the roasted seed is a coffee substitute. The flowering tops are distilled in water to make a refreshing acid beverage, and the chopped up plant can be used as a rennet to coagulate plant milks or dairy milk and has been used for sheep and goat's milk for making cheese and may improve and sweeten the taste. A yellow dye from the flowering stems can be used as a food colouring [1, 2]

**Medical Uses:** Lady's bedstraw can be used as a tea or tincture (harvested as it comes into flower) for some urinary problems such as stones or gravel, for skin complaints and to stop bleeding particularly nosebleeds. With regards to the skin the plant is used as a poultice on cuts, skin infections, slow-healing wounds and so on, and also a powder made from the fresh plant is used to soothe reddened skin and reduce inflammation. The plant was also used in the past in cases of epilepsy [1, 2].

Photo August 2010?



Large Yellow Ox-eye

Latin: *Telekia speciosa*



Edible Uses: Nothing found

Medical Uses: Nothing found

Photo July 2010

## Purple-Loosestrife

Latin: *Lythrum salicaria*

Family: *Lythraceae*



**Botanical Note:** The leaves come directly out of the stem (do not have stalks) in pairs or in threes. The stems have four or more raised lines on them. The flowers usually have 6 petals.

**Edible Uses:** The leaves can be eaten cooked and are rich in calcium. The root is claimed to be edible cooked, however see my personal experience below. An edible dye is obtained from the flowers [1].

**Medical Uses:** While this herb is little used today it was apparently highly thought of in the past. Most of its uses focus on the fact that the plant is highly astringent and is antibiotic. This means that it may be useful for diarrhoea, quinsy (peritonsillar abscesses), abnormal bleeding and heavy periods. It may also help in fevers, liver diseases, constipation (although I am highly doubtful about this because of it being so effective for diarrhoea), and raised blood sugar levels. The flowering plant can be used fresh or dry as an infusion (and presumably also made into a tincture) for treating these conditions.

Externally, the plant is used as a cleansing and healing wash for wounds, sores, sore eyes, preserving sight, impetigo, eczema, vaginal discharge and itching. The powdered plant is used for nosebleeds. The stems can be chewed to strengthen weak or bleeding gums.

An interesting recipe for an ointment is given by Mrs Grieves: An ointment may be made with the water (a steam distillation from the plant) 1 OZ. (28ml) to 2 drachms (a very old unit of measurement - it might mean 7ml or 7.8g) of May butter without salt, and the same quantity of sugar and wax boiled gently together. May butter is made by melting fresh unsalted butter in the Sun repeatedly until it grows of a whitish Colour [1, 2].

**Personal Experience:** I have tried to eat the roots of this plant twice with little success. The first time I pulled a fairly mature plant out of the vegetable garden and a long wooden part of a root (stolon I think) came with it but not all of the root structure. Even after a while cooking it was still too tough apart from the central pithy core, which wouldn't amount to much food. The second time I pulled up young plants from the herb garden and this time got the whole roots, but after a while boiling most of it was too woody to eat, though I did manage to chew some bits. The taste was good however, like that of caramel. The water it was boiled in was too astringent to drink though not bad tasting. Unless part of the root of the mature plant is good to eat I don't think the root is of much use for food, this is a shame as it is an invasive species. The bit of leaf I nibbled on tasted okay.

Photo July 2010

## Yellow Loosestrife

Latin: *Lysimachia vulgaris*

Family: *Lysimachia*



**Botanical Note:** The leaves are in pairs or threes or fours, they are dotted with black or orange glands and are oval or a long-oval. The plant is softly-hairy. The flowers have 5 petals.

**Edible Uses:** Possibly the young leaves are edible [1].

**Medical Uses:** This herb is not to my knowledge commonly used in medicine today, however it has its uses. Like Purple Loosestrife this herb is astringent (although not antibiotic like the purple one) and so it can be used to treat conditions such as diarrhoea; to stop bleeding, including bleeding of the mouth and nose; quinsy (peritonsillar abscesses); to cleanse wounds; and help heal hurts of the eyes and preserve sight. It may also help a cough. It makes an okay mouthwash for treating sore gums and mouth ulcers. It is harvested when in flower in July and dried for later use [1, 2]

**Other Uses:** The plant appears to be obnoxious to gnats and flies and the dried herb used to be burnt in houses, so that the smoke might drive them away. It was particularly valuable in marshy districts. Snakes were said to disappear immediately the fumes of the burning herb came near them [2].

Photo August 2010



## Marsh Marigold

Latin: *Caltha palustris*

Family: *Ranunculaceae*



This plant is largely poisonous and I wouldn't recommend it be used at all, however, for sake of completeness I have included uses some have ascribed to it.

**Edible Uses:** It is strongly irritant. However, some authors say that the flowers, leaves and roots are edible if well cooked, sometimes changing the water. Extreme caution should be used with this though, only ever trying the minutest amount first, and never attempt to eat it raw [1].

**Medical Uses:** Having a lot of the flowers in a room, or having an infusion of the flowers is said to have helped with fits, however, as the plant is poisonous I would not recommend using it internally. Externally it may help with warts, rheumatism, and mashed and boiled for a poultice on sores, however, it may cause irritation and blisters - use something else! [1, 2].

Photo April 2011

## Ragged Robin

Latin: *Lychnis flos-cuculi*



Edible Uses: None found

Medical Uses: None found

Other Uses: It can be used a soap as the root contains saponins, a soap substitute that can be used for washing clothes, hair etc. It is extracted by boiling the roots in water. Do not overboil the roots because this will break down the saponins [1].

Photo June 2010

## St John's Wort

Latin: *Hypericum perforatum*



**Botanical Note:** There are several types of St John's Wort and some do not make very good medicines for humans. To get the right species it should have a **round stem** not square, it should be **hairless**, and when you hold a leaf up to the light it should have lots of little **transparent dots on the leaf**. These are actually oil glands.

**Edible Uses:** None found

**Medical Uses:** St. Johns Wort has a reputation for helping in depression, but it actually is very good for the nervous system as a whole, but it doesn't stop there: it treats infections, helps the digestive system, helps some urinary problems, helps with reproductive system problems, helps some respiratory complaints and it is an excellent remedy for wounds. I'll look at these in turn below. The flowering shoots harvested in early summer are used.

**Nervous system:** It helps calm, strengthen and uplift the nervous system and eases nerve pain. This

means it is good for mild to moderate depression, anxiety, nervousness, restlessness, obsessive-compulsive disorder and some other psychological disorders, PMS, some cases of insomnia, nerve pains, fibromyalgia, and chronic fatigue syndrome.

**Infections:** St Johns Wort is antiviral and antibiotic, and is very useful for cold sores, chickenpox, shingles and tetanus.

**Digestion:** It strengthens digestion and helps the nervous system of the digestion, it normalises stomach acid, helps heal gastric ulcers, aids the liver, help with diarrhoea and painful haemorrhoids.

**Urinary Problems:** It tones the urinary system, being helpful in bed-wetting in children, excessive urination, emotions influencing the bladder, and incontinence.

**Reproductive:** It helps painful and irregular periods and is useful in the menopause

**Respiratory:** it can help treat coughs, bronchitis, bleeding from the lungs and tuberculosis.

**Wounds and external use:** St Johns Wort is excellent for healing wounds especially for nerve-rich areas It is also good for sores, burns, muscle strains, bites, bruises, ulcers, boils and caked breasts. A tea, tincture, poultice or oil of the fresh flowers can be used for these problems [1, 2, 3, 6, 7].

Energetically, according to Matthew Wood, St Johns Wort helps improve the gut level instincts, thus helping people deal with unconscious phenomena in their lives. In the past it was said to protect against demons and witchcraft, and today it may by strengthening a person help stop them being dominated by people who are harmful to them [3].

**Author's experience:** Both times I have given St John's Wort oil (with Rosemary oil added) for nerve and muscle related pain, used externally, the people have reported great benefit from it.



## Devil's-bit Scabious

(Caution - is very similar looking flower this can be confused with, see text below)

Latin: *Succisa pratensis*

Family: Dipsacaceae



**Botanical Note:** The leaves are elliptical, opposite (the leaves come out in pairs opposite each other), sometimes have teeth on upper leaves, and often are blotched with purple. All the little flowers that make up the flower-head are about the same size.

Do not confuse with Sheep's Bit which has different leaves that are not opposite, it also has united anthers, and it differs from the compound flower of Scabious in having a two-celled capsule (whatever that means!). Sheep's bit also has a strong and disagreeable smell when bruised. [2]

**Edible Uses:** The leaves and young shoots are edible. The tender young shoots can be added to spring salads [1].

**Medical Uses:** Although I am not aware of this plant being used much at present it has been reported to help in three main areas: infectious conditions, skin-related issues and 'purifying the blood' or what may be classed as detoxing. These will be looked at in turn below. The plant may also help ease

inflammation, get rid of worms, and bring on periods (so may be wise to avoid in pregnancy).

The whole plant is used, including sometimes the root. It is collected in September.

**Infectious conditions:** it is useful as a tea in coughs, swollen throat or tonsils, and fevers as it soothes and helps sweat out a fever. The powdered root can also be given in fevers. The distilled water from the plant can be used as an eye lotion to treat conjunctivitis [1, 2]

**Skin:** A tea, ointment or juice of the herb can be used on skin sores, bruising, and eczema. The tea can also be drunk to help the same conditions (including internal bruising). A warm decoction of the plant can be used as a wash for head sores and dandruff. [1, 2]

**Detoxing:** It is cleansing and so can help clear the skin of pimples, sores, freckles, etc. It possibly may help against a venomous bite [2].

Photo August 2010

## Field Scabious

Latin: *Knautia arvensis*

Family: *Dipsacaceae*



**Botanical Note:** The flowers around the edge of each flower-head are slightly larger than the ones making up the middle unlike Devil's-bit Scabious. The lower leaves of the plant are pinnately-divided (each leaf looks like it is made up of many leaves - see below).



**Edible Uses:** None found.

**Medical Uses:** This plant is not commonly used today however it does have medicinal value. The whole flowering plant can be used, with or without the roots. Its uses are as follows.

**Skin:** internally it is detoxing helping skin complaints like eczema. Externally it is good for scabs, carbuncles, shrunk sinews or veins (don't ask me, I'm just quoting Culpepper!), wounds, burns, bruises, ulcers, sores and eruptions. [1, 2]

**Respiratory:** shortness of breath, coughs, other lung diseases. [2]

**Other:** pains and stitch in the side. [2]

Photo June 2010

## Sneezewort

Latin: *Achillea ptarmica*

Family: *Achillea*



**Botanical Note:** The leaves are narrow and have sharp teeth. The petals each have 3 slight lobes on them. This plant is closely related to Yarrow and to me looks like the stocky cousin of Yarrow.

**Edible Uses:** The leaves can be eaten raw or cooked and used as a flavouring in salads [1].

**Medical Uses:** It is not commonly used and potential uses for it are generally vague. The leaf can be chewed to relieve toothache. It may have an influence on the circulatory system, help sweating in a fever, aid digestion, stop bleeding, help bring on a period, and cause sneezing (ok so the last one is probably more reliable considering the name of the plant [1]).

**Other Uses:** The leaves can be used as an insect repellent [1].

Photo August 2010



## Germander Speedwell

Latin: *Veronica chamaedrys*

Family: *Veronica*



**Botanical Note:** The stems, particularly the lower stems, have two lines of hairs running along them on opposite sides.

**Edible Uses:** The leaves can be used as a tea [1].

**Medical Uses:** This herb is not commonly used much in herbal medicine. It can be used internally as a detoxifier (it may help stimulate the kidneys) to help some skin diseases and can also be used externally for skin diseases, especially if they are itchy. An infusion of the leaves can be used

for coughs, asthma and catarrh [1, 2]

Photo May 2011

## Tormentil

Latin: *Potentilla erecta*

Family: *Potentilla*



**Botanical Note:** The flowers nearly always just have 4 petals. The leaves have 5 lobes making them a bit like the fingers of a hand spread out. They are also quite jagged. Occasionally there are just 3 parts to the leaves

**Edible Uses:** The roots are extremely rich in tannin which if boiled for a long time makes a gum that can be eaten as an emergency food if there is nothing else [1].

**Medical Uses:** It is a very powerful remedy against all inflammations and bleeding, it is also nourishing so particularly helps the intestines. Matthew Wood also says it has some very reliable psychological/magical properties [3]. These are all detailed below. It should be made fresh every year in early spring or late autumn, and contact with iron, copper, iodine, bismuth and Roman Chamomile should be avoided due to the high tannin content. Powder or tincture of the root is most effective [8].

**Intestinal problems:** diarrhoea, infections, bleeding, gastroenteritis, bleeding piles, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and colitis [8].

**Skin:** Bleeding wounds or cuts (sprinkle finely ground root powder on it or use a compress with tincture on it), diaper rash and other rashes, oozing eczema, chapped skin, cracked skin and lips, warts, hand palsies [3, 8].

**Mouth:** inflamed, bleeding or receding gums; periodontal disease; gingivitis; ulcers (canker sores); sore throats; toothache; and all inflammation or oral and pharyngeal cavities, infected sinuses [1, 2, 3, 8].

**Psychological or magical properties:** corrects problems to do with hierarchical organisations (employer/employee problems), interference in one's work and employment, boundary or legal tensions (place leaf or spray tincture on the documents, boundary or work space involved). [3].

**Other:** excessive menstruation and leucorrhoea, inflamed eyes, raised blood sugar levels [1, 2, 3, 8].

Herbal toothpowder can be made from Tormentil root, sage leaves and coal made from Linden (Lime tree) wood in equal parts ground finely together [8]

Photo June 2010



## Valerian

Latin: *Valeriana officinalis*

Family: *Valerianaceae*



**Botanical Note:** It is a quite tall plant, up to 1.5m. The flowers are pink to white. The flowers are clustered together but DO NOT form a well ordered umbel (like the carrot family do - an umbel is like the flowers are arranged like an upside-down umbrella). The leaves are pinnate, or pinnately lobed (each leaf looks like it is made of several - see picture below).

**NOTE:** Be very careful identifying any plant which looks like this does in the picture on the left. To an untrained eye it looks quite similar to other highly poisonous plants.



**Edible Uses:** Seeds of other members of this genus are parched and then eaten. An essential oil from the leaves and root is used as a flavouring and the leaves can also be used as a condiment [1].

**Medical Uses:** It is a very useful herb for relaxing the nervous system, helping with pain and for relaxing muscles in, according to Matthew Woods, a generalised none-specific way. Note that in large doses or for susceptible people (and cats) it can have the opposite effect and be overstimulating. The root is used, collected in Autumn after leaves have died down and is much more effective fresh or dried at a low temperature [1, 3].

**Nervous system:** Insomnia, nervous excitement, restlessness, distress, nervous disturbances related to menopause, problems related to poor cerebral circulation, good for very freaked out people, emotionally induced high blood pressure [3].

**Pain:** spinal pain when associated with restlessness, temporal and frontal headache, pains after giving birth, neuralgic pains [1, 3].

**Muscle relaxant:** intestinal spasm, flatulence, emotional indigestion; bronchial spasm, coughs, asthma, breathlessness, palpitations, bladder spasm, menstrual spasm, other muscle spasms [3].

**Other:** for someone who holds anger inside causing knotted feeling in stomach or low back. Counters the effect of alcohol, helps low libido, strengthens eyesight especially if due to weakness in the optic nerve [2, 3].

## Tufted Vetch

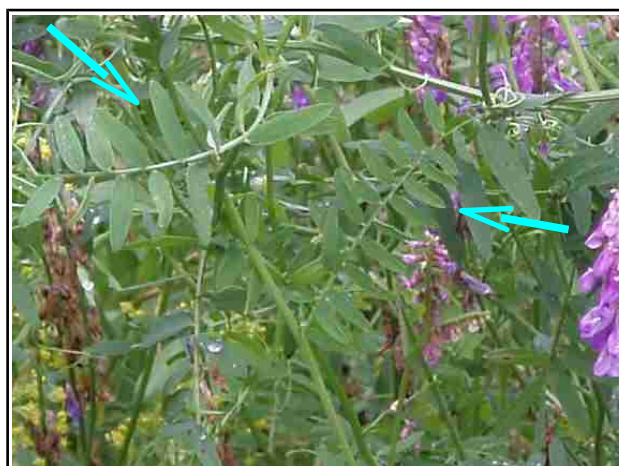
Latin: *Vicia cracca*

Family: *Vicia*



**Botanical Note:** The tall blue-violet spikes of flowers show this apart from most of the plants of the same family. See the picture below for the leaves. The pods are brown when fully mature.

A similar looking species of Vetch – Fodder Vetch also has edible leaves and seeds according to PFAF (though there is a slight caution about it) so if I have got the identification a little wrong with this plant it shouldn't be too much of a worry.



**Edible Uses:** The seeds can be eaten boiled or roasted. The leaves and young stems can be eaten cooked or used as a tea substitute [1].

**Medical Uses:** The cooked plant can be used as a galactagogue to cause milk secretion from the breasts [1]

**Personal Experience:** Eating seeds. I collected the matured seed pods from one of these plants which was quite easy all in all. Getting the seeds out was only a little more fiddly than with sunflower seeds. After several minutes cooking they were still not soft (are they meant to be soft like peas?), a few minutes later and they ran out of water and burnt, so the experiment needs to be tried again. Perhaps it would be better to cook the fresh green 'peas' from the pods?

Photo July 2010



## Meadow Vetchling

Latin: *Lathyrus pratensis*

Family: *Lathyrus*



**Edible Uses:** None, the seeds may be harmful [1].

**Medical Uses:** The seeds are apparently used (by someone) in Spain to break down tumors. But I do not at all suggest trying it as, amongst other things, the information about its use is very scarce and the seeds may be toxic [1].

Photo August 2010

## Wood Cow-Wheat

Latin: *Melampyren nemorosum*



Edible Uses: None found

Medical Uses: none found

Picture June 2010

## Yellow Rattle

Latin: *Rhinanthus minor*



**Botanical Note:** The flowers after they have dried into seed pods rattle if you knock them (hence its name!). The leaves are well toothed and the flowers have got a large round base that turns into the 'rattle'.

**Edible Uses:** None found

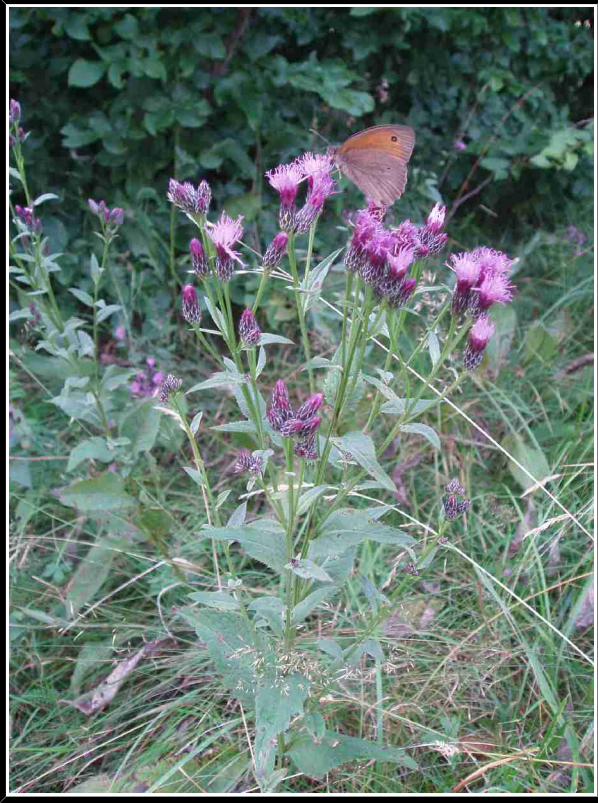
**Medicinal Uses:** Not commonly used, however, it may be useful in some eye complaints and have some similarities to Eyebright. The herb may be drunk for coughs, or for poor sight. The tea or the seed may be applied externally to the eye and may remove any film from it. However this is taken from a very old source so caution should be taken [2].

Photo taken June 2010



## Saw-Wort

Latin: *Serratula tinctoria*



**Botanical Note:** The leaves have fine but sharp teeth. The base of the flowers have what are called bracts on them at the base of the flower, these are diamond shaped and have a vivid white line around them making them stand out (see picture below).



**Edible Uses:** The young leaves and flowers may be edible cooked [1].

**Medical Uses:** It is astringent and may help stop bleeding [1].

**Other Uses:** A durable fine yellow dye can be got from the juice of this plant [1].

Photo August 2010



## References

- (1) *Plants For A Future* (<http://pfaf.org>) which is a free online database for the food, medicinal and other uses of many plants
- (2) *A Modern Herbal* by Mrs Grieves (<http://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/mgmh.html>) a very detailed herbal covering many plants, including not only medicinal uses, but descriptions of herbs, history of usage, non medicinal usages and some recipes.
- (3) *The Earthwise Herbal* by Matthew Woods
- (4) *Food For Free (Collins gem)* by Richard Mabey
- (5) *Medical Herbalism* by David Hoffmann
- (6) *The A-Z of Modern Herbalism* by Simon Mills
- (7) *A Clinical Guide to Blending Liquid Herbs* by Kerry Bone
- (8) *Complete Earth Medicine Handbook* by Susanne Fischer-Rizzi