

Abstract

KIDNEYWORT, NAVELWORT, (WALL) PENNYWORT, UMBILICUS RUPESTRIS, PATHAR CHAT IN URDU

This plant is called Pennywort because of the shape of its leaves which are coin shaped with an indent which makes them look as though they have a navel. The names Navelwort and kidneywort also refer to the shape of the leaves, although, Culpeper the 17th century English herbalist also says that they are good for the kidneys, hence the name.

Formerly the Latin name for this plant was *Cotyledon umbilicus-veneris*, *kotyle* meaning cup in Greek, *umbilicus*, navel and *veneris* of Venus in Latin, so named because ancient herbalists believed that the plant came under the rule of Venus. It is also called *Umbilicus pedulinis*. It is a member of the *Crassulaceae* or stonecrop family of plants, which makes it a relative of the houseleek (*Sempervivum tectorum*) and orpine (*Sedum telephium*). The leaves look a little like those of the nasturtiums grown in so many gardens around the world. Despite the name Pennywort this plant is no relation to the Indian Pennywort, (*Centella asiatica*), although this plant is found in parts of Asia where it is used to heal callouses on the feet. The leaf juice is used for this purpose.

Kidneywort is found in Europe and in western parts of Britain, in Wales, the Clyde Islands in Scotland, and western England, as well as Ireland. It extends through to North Africa from the Mediterranean. In strong sunlight, the flowering tops of the plant can turn red.

The leaves are edible, but best eaten in early spring or winter, when they have a fairly pleasant mild flavour. They can be cooked or put raw in salads, but are best left alone at other times of the year as the taste is stronger and less pleasant.

The leaves are used medicinally and have mild pain relieving properties and can be put on scratches too in order to stop the stinging pain and they are also used to put on minor burns and scalds. The juice of the leaves and an extract from the plant was used to treat epilepsy and this use was revived briefly in the 19th century.

Nicholas Culpeper has this to say about it in his "Complete Herbal" written in the 17th century.

"Government and virtues: Venus challenges the herb under Libra. The juice or the distilled water being drank, is very effectual for all inflammations and unnatural heats, to cool a fainting hot stomach, a hot liver, or the bowels: the herb, juice, or distilled water thereof, outwardly applied, heals pimples, St. Anthony's fire, and other outward heats. The said juice or water helps to heal sore kidneys, torn or fretted by the stone, or exulcerated within; it also provokes urine, is available for the dropsy, and helps to break the stone. Being used as a bath, or made into an ointment, it cools the painful piles or hæmorrhoidal veins. It is no less effectual to give ease to the pains of the gout, the sciatica, and helps the kernels or knots in the neck or throat, called the king's evil: healing kibes and chilblains if they be bathed with the juice, or anointed with ointment made thereof, and some of the skin of the leaf upon them: it is also used in green wounds to stay the blood, and to heal them quickly."

As it is a member of the stonecrop family it likes to grow in moist, rocky places, so have a look for it next time you are in such a place!