



# A Pocket Guide to European Folk Remedies







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# Wild Angelica

(*Angelica sylvestris*)

The roots of the angelica plant have long been used in traditional Austrian medicine. They were usually prepared in the form of a tea or tincture for the treatment of gastrointestinal, respiratory, and nervous disorders. In addition, the remedy also worked against common ailments such as fever, infections, and the flu.



Until the 20th century, the herb was eaten as a vegetable; the stem was eaten fresh, and the leaves could be boiled into a stew for storage. Afterwards, it could later be cooked up with milk into a tasty dish. The plant also has a history of being used for textiles.

# Feverfew

(*Tanacetum parthenium*)

Feverfew is famously used for the prevention of fever and migraines, hence the name.

Rather than simply alleviating the pain of headaches, it centers on treating the cause of them. Feverfew is also used in the treatment of arthritis, muscle tension, menstrual cramps, insect bites, and digestive problems.



The most common methods of preparation involve decoctions and tinctures. This involves mashing the main parts of the herb and then simmering them in water (alcohol for tinctures) to extract the essential oils and compounds of the plant. Afterwards, the herbal remains are strained from the liquid, leaving the enriched water for the patient to drink. A decoction of feverfew is said to be good for coughs and wheezing.

# Marsh Gentian

(*Gentiana pneumonanthe*)



The leaves and roots of *Gentiana punctata* (any species within the genus *Gentiana*) have been used in traditional Austrian medicine internally and externally as liqueur or tea for treatment of gastrointestinal, skin, locomotor, liver and bile, paediatric, fever, flu, rheumatism, and gout disorders. The roots of the Marsh Gentian, in particular, can be made into a general tonic for the digestive system. This particular species can be found in boggy meadows, fens, and peaty clearings in the woods.

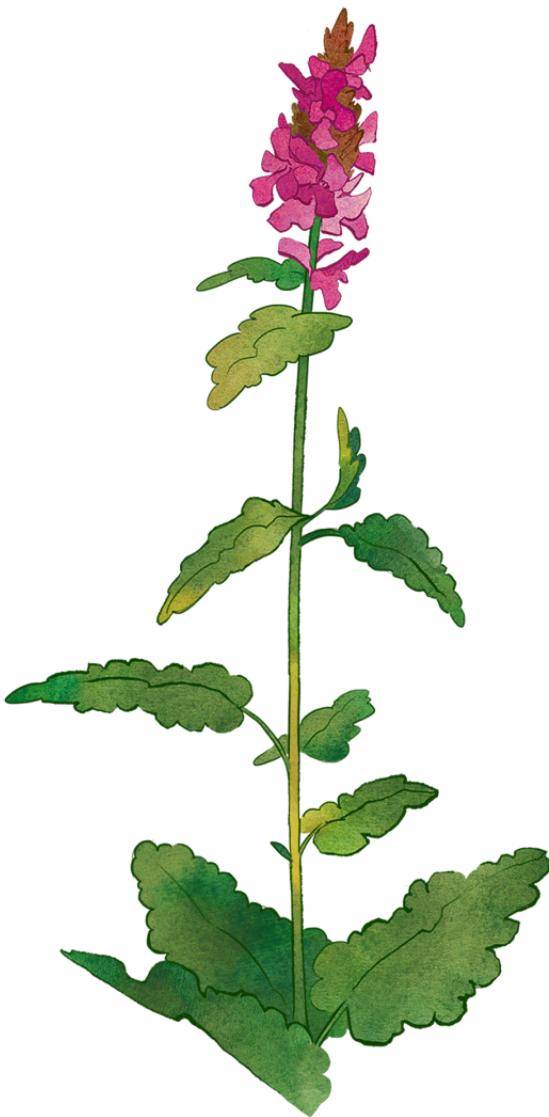
# Bishop's Wort (Betony)

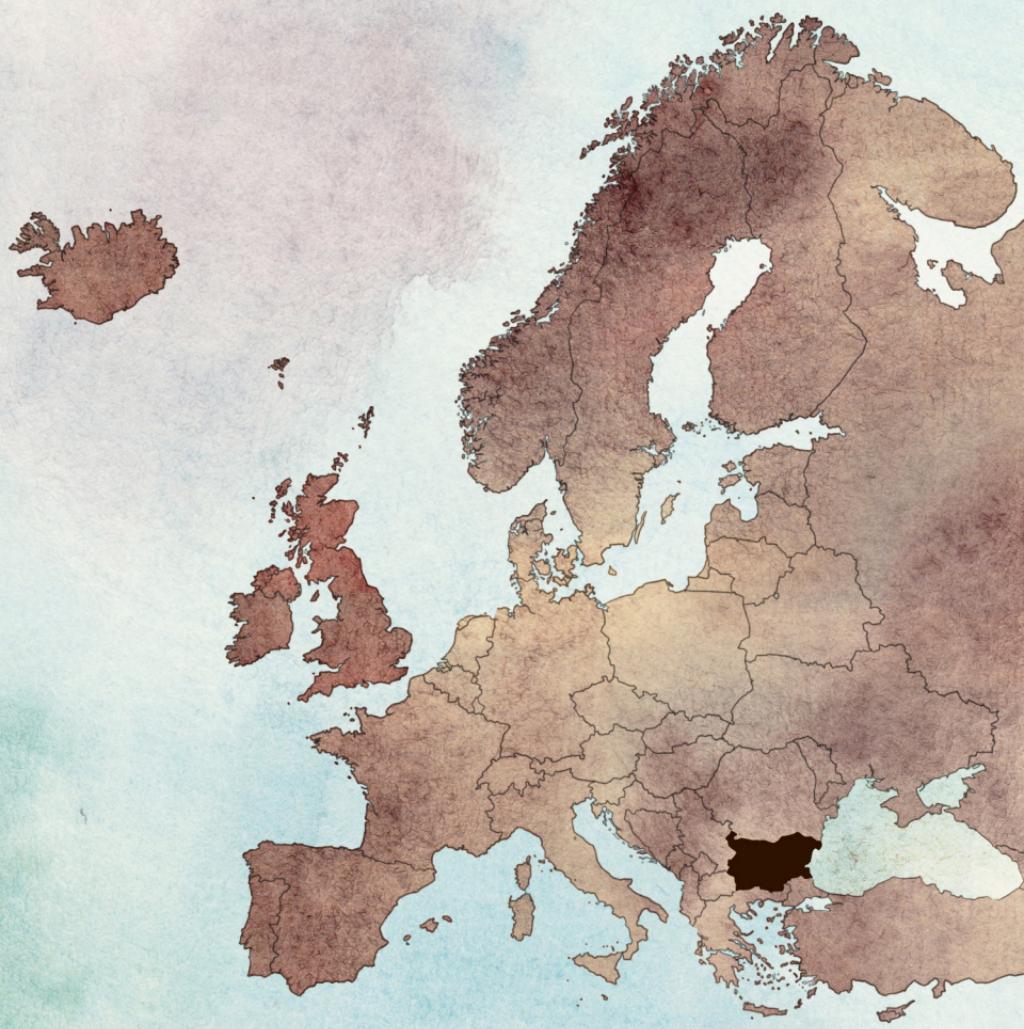
(*Stachys officinalis*)

The first reference to Wood Betony occurs in a work by the Roman physician Antonius Musa, who believed it to be an effective talisman against sorcery. It was commonly planted in churchyards to prevent any visitations by ghosts or spirits, hence its name. The plant was valued for its many remedial properties during the Middle Ages, as evidenced by an old Spanish saying, “He has as many virtues as Betony.”

In Austria, Bishop's Wort—or Wood Betony—was used in the form of tea or compresses for the treatment of disorders of the respiratory tract, gastrointestinal tract, nervous system, skin and gynecological problems. Its native habitat includes grasslands, open woods, and meadows, and it is typically collected in the summer during its flowering season.

In modern times, wood betony is much less used than it was centuries ago. Nowadays, it is used as part of a mixture of herbs. However, its reputation as a tonic is still acknowledged as it is used to treat nervous disorders.

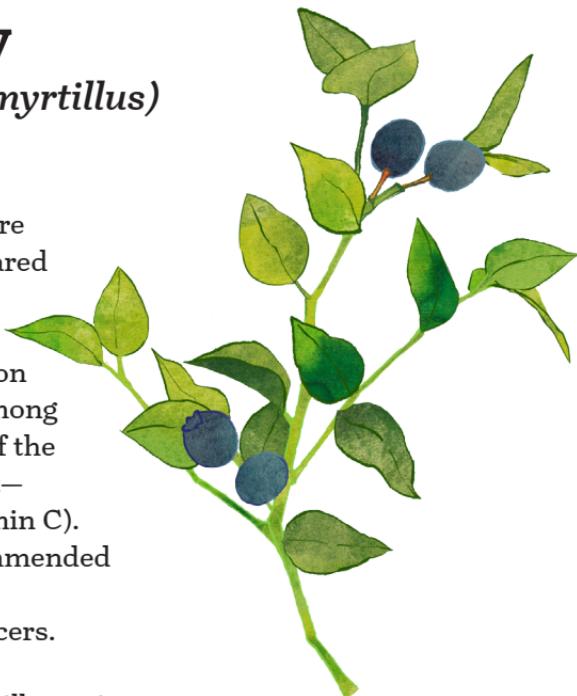




# Bilberry

(*Vaccinium myrtillus*)

The leaves of the bilberry plant were historically prepared as a standard treatment for scurvy (a condition once common among sailors because of the lack of fresh fruit—specifically, vitamin C). It was also recommended for urinary tract infections and ulcers.



These days, the bilberry is used for many conditions, including diarrhea, menstrual cramps, and circulation problems. The berry, which is known to have a mild laxative effect, can be eaten whole or made into extracts and was commonly given to children to treat diarrhea. Additionally, a distilled water prepared from the leaves serves as an excellent eyewash for inflamed or sore eyes.

# Common Sage

(*Salvia officinalis*)

Sage has had a very long history of medicinal use and is an important domestic remedy found in many homes. The Greek physician Dioscorides once wrote that an aqueous decoction of sage stopped the bleeding of wounds and cleaned ulcers and sores.



It is used by herbalists to treat sprains, swelling, ulcers, and bleeding. Due to its antiseptic properties, a tea made from sage leaves serves as an effective treatment for sore throats and coughs through gargling. Moreover, the leaves can relieve toothaches when applied directly to the teeth. It is particularly noted for strengthening the nervous system, improving memory, and sharpening the senses.

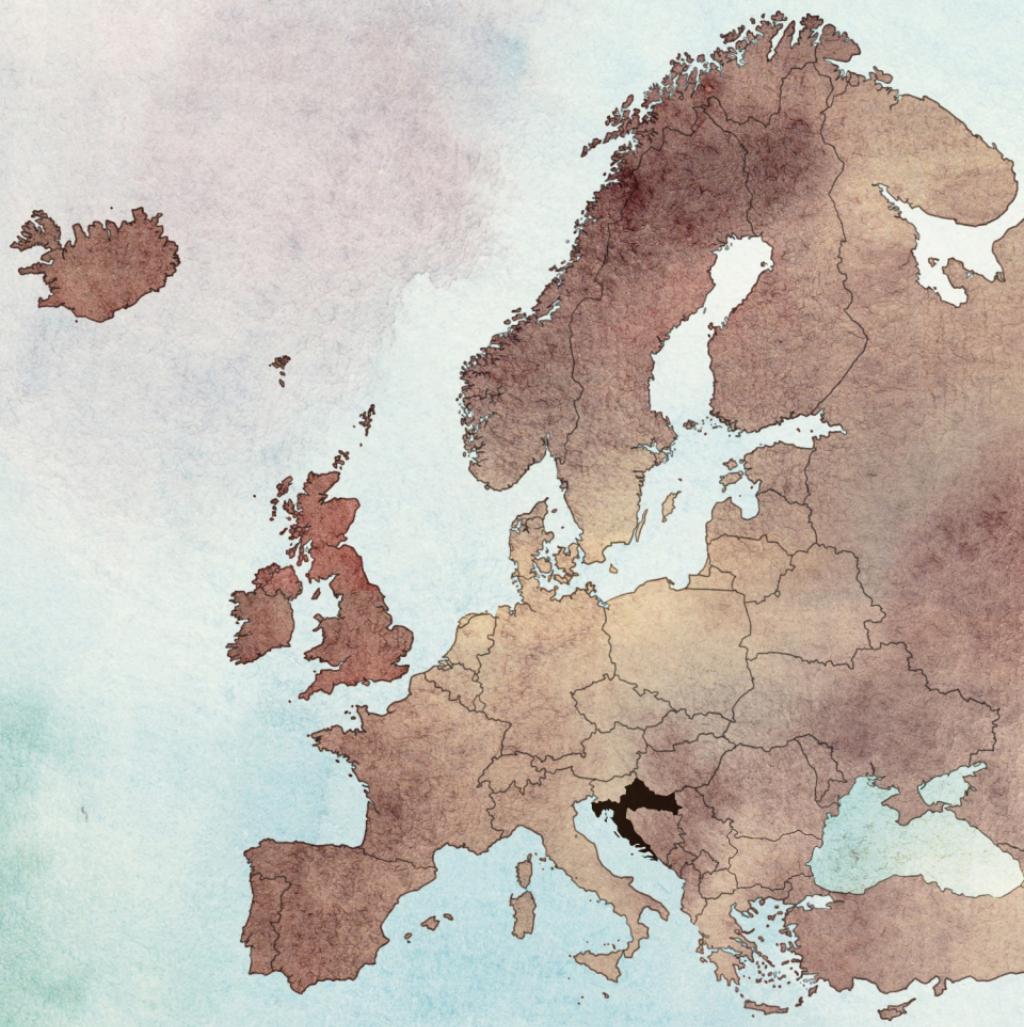
# Yarrow

(*Achillea millefolium*)

The leaves of the yarrow plant are very effective in stopping the flow of blood, making it a good treatment for nosebleeds and high blood pressure. The aerial parts of the plant are used for phlegm conditions as a bitter digestive tonic to encourage bile flow and as a diuretic. They can also act as a tonic for the blood, stimulating the circulation system. It has been proven effective in treating menstrual disorders, and bringing down fevers.

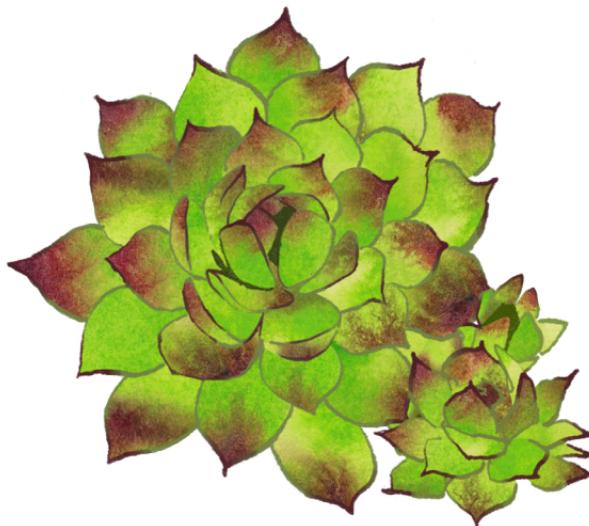


One of the yarrow's famous qualities is its ability to intensify the medicinal action of other herbs taken with it.



# Common Houseleek

(*Sempervivum tectorum*)



The juice of the common houseleek is known for its cooling and astringent effects and is used topically for many skin conditions. The leaves are heated and applied directly onto the skin as a poultice for the treatment of burns, stings, bites, and warts. Unlike many herbs, the houseleek prefers more urban environments and is seen growing on structures such as roofs, chimneys, walls, and limestone. They are a common houseplant found throughout much of Southern Europe.

# Garlic

(*Allium sativum*)

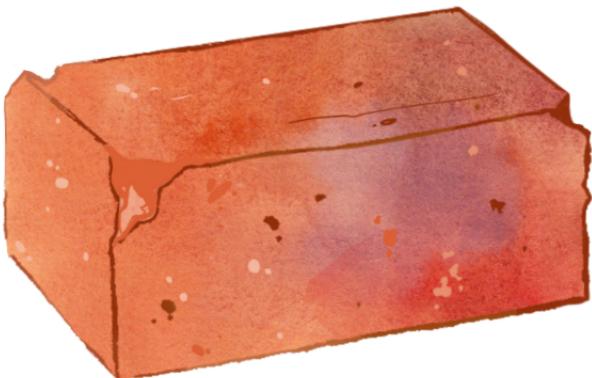
Garlic contains several compounds that possess antibacterial, antifungal and antiviral properties, earning it the nickname “poor man’s penicillin.” The plant’s outstanding germicidal properties made it a famous disinfectant for gangrene during World War I and II.



Eating garlic may reduce the frequency of colds when it is eaten for prevention. Applied topically, garlic has been shown to be effective in treating fungal infections such as ringworm and athlete’s foot.

Daily consumption of garlic, even in minute quantities, has been shown to have a very beneficial effect on the body, especially on the blood and heart. Outside of medicine, garlic can be prepared as a fungicide, insecticide, and glue.

## Hot Brick



An unusual Croatian folk remedy was to place a heated brick on the stomach of a patient to relieve cramps. Alternatively, a hot compress or towel will work just as well in alleviating pain.



# Spearmint

(*Mentha spicata*)



The use of mint as an herbal medicine dates back to the ancient Greeks, where it was used as an aromatherapy treatment to address intense headaches and migraines. The essential oils of the leaves are antiseptic, although it should be taken in small quantities as large doses are toxic. Chewing sprigs of mint can alleviate an unsettled stomach and other digestive issues. Besides being used in herbalism, spearmint is widely used to repel insects and rodents, since they intensely dislike the smell.

# Beetroot

(*Beta vulgaris*)

Although its use has declined in herbal medicine, beetroot has a long history of folk use. Thanks to the high quality of iron, the ancient Greeks would drink beet juice to treat anemia and related conditions. Indeed, there has been evidence that shows that regular consumption of beetroot and fresh beetroot juice helps to increase red blood count levels in a patient suffering from anemia.



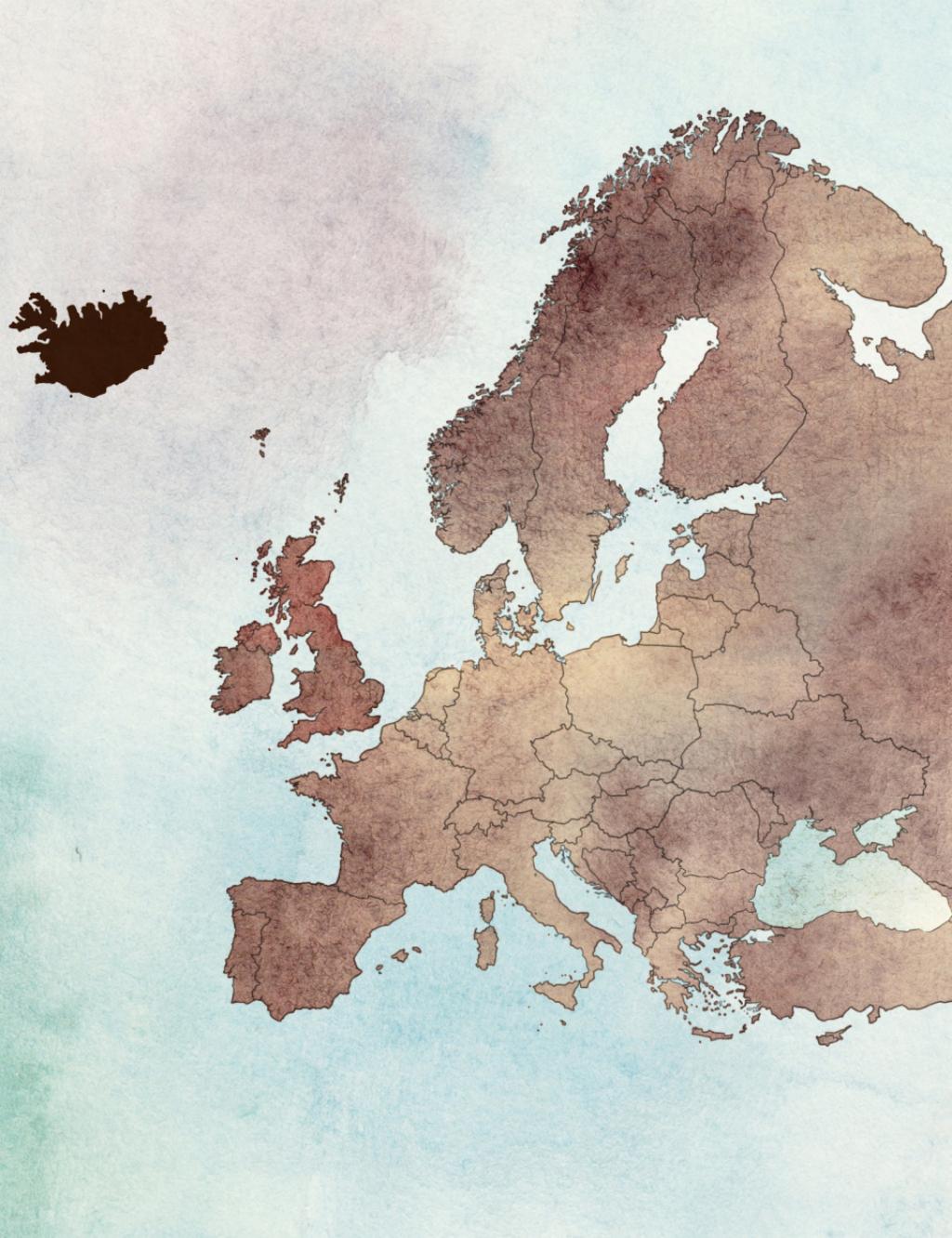
In the old days, beet juice was also used to clear ringing ears and alleviate toothaches. Combined with vinegar, it was also used on the hair to treat dandruff.

# Horseradish

(*Armoracia rusticana*)

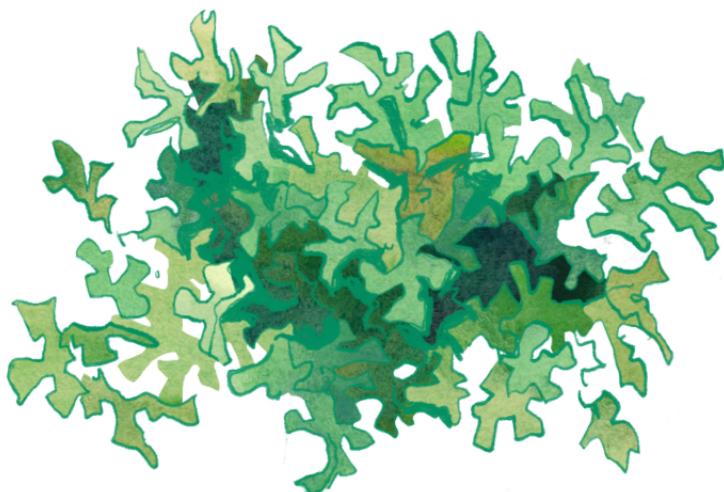


Horseradish is known as a very pungent plant with potent antibacterial properties, as well as a powerful stimulant. During the winter months, ancient Greeks would eat small doses of horseradish as a way to get rid of excess phlegm trapped in the lungs and respiratory tract. When cultivated fresh, the root of the plant can be grated into a sandwich and serve as a traditional remedy for hay fever. A poultice made from the roots can be prepared and applied on the skin to treat arthritis and infected wounds.



# Icelandic Moss

(*Cetraria islandica*)



Icelandic moss is highly prized among herbalists because of its demulcent (inflammation-relieving) and bitter tonic effects—a combination that is unique in medicinal herbs. Therefore, it is of value for all types of chronic digestive problems, as well as for all types of coughs and inflammations of the mouth and pharynx. It soothes the mucous membranes of the chest, counters congestion, and calms dry coughs, making it an ideal treatment for elderly patients.

# Alpine Bistort

(*Bistorta vivipara*)

Alpine Bistort was used as food in the past. Either the entire plant was eaten, or the seeds—called field corn—were mulled and used for baking or drunk with milk. The plant is a good remedy for sore throat, gingivitis and diarrhea and is also used as an anti-inflammatory.

The plant can be found in mountain grasslands and all kinds of bogs and heathers. It can be distilled and gargled to treat sore throats, and it is a usual ingredient for lotions that treat ulcers. When cooked, the Alpine Bistort has a sweet, nutty, and wholesome flavor.



# Sweet Vernal Grass

(*Anthoxanthum odoratum*)



Sweet vernal grass is not only a diuretic and strengthens the heart, but also gives off a sweet smell and was therefore used as an air freshener in closets and chests. It is said that a tincture made with this grass and a spirit of wine is an immediate cure for hay fever. Usually, however, the plant is applied externally.



# Potato

(*Solanum tuberosum*)



Whilst mainly used as a staple food, potatoes do have a number of medicinal virtues. A juice made from the tubers, when taken in moderation, can be helpful in the treatment of peptic ulcers, bringing relief from pain and acidity. A poultice can be made from boiling potatoes in water and applied for rheumatic joints, swellings, skin rashes, haemorrhoids, etc. Peeled but uncooked potatoes can be pounded in a mortar and then applied cold as a soothing plaster to burns and scalds. Freshly peeled potato skins are used to treat swollen gums and to heal burns.

# Stinging Nettles

(*Urtica dioica*)

The stinging nettle, despite its reputation for causing itching and burning rashes when touched, has a long history of usage in herbal medicine. The stinging nettle has been used for hundreds of years to treat painful muscles and joints, eczema, arthritis, gout, and anemia.



Today, many people use it to treat urinary problems during the early stages of an enlarged prostate (called benign prostatic hyperplasia or BPH). It is also used in compresses or creams for treating joint pain, sprains and strains, tendonitis, and insect bites. The leaves as an infusion has been proven to be effective in stemming internal bleeding, and when rubbed directly onto the skin they can help treat rheumatism.

# Dock Leaves

(*Rumex obtusifolius*)

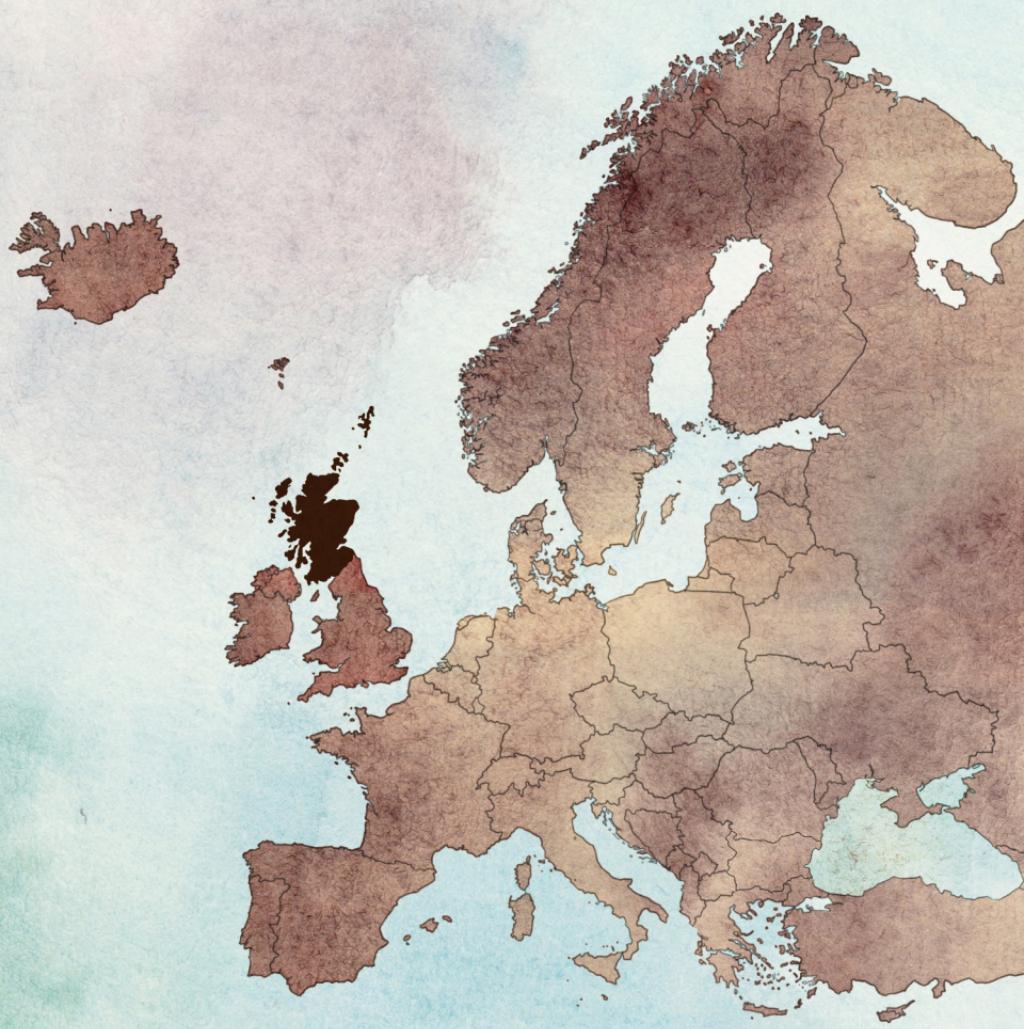


The Common Dock is most famous as a popular cure for Nettle stings and rashes. Additionally, the leaves are often applied as a rustic remedy for burns and scalds and used for dressing blisters. The plant is frequently called Butter Dock, because its cool leaves have often been used in Ireland for wrapping up butter for the market.

In olden times, the cure was accompanied by the words:

*'Nettle in, Dock;  
Dock in, Nettle out  
Dock rub Nettle out,'*

and is the origin of the saying: 'In Dock, out Nettle'.



# Dulse

(*Palmaria palmata*)

Dulse, like all seaweeds, is not an herb but rather a marine algae.

In Skye, dulse was used as a treatment for headache, colic, constipation and worms. Boiling the seaweed in milk and sweetening it with honey was a popular treatment given to those who were rundown and listless – a use that is supported by modern research concerning the stimulating properties of most seaweeds.



Beyond herbal medicine, dried dulse can be smoked as a tobacco substitute, and is enjoyed as a popular snack in Canada, Ireland, Scotland, and Norway. The ashes from burned dulse was also used for preserving foods.

# Eyebright

(*Euphrasiae herba*)

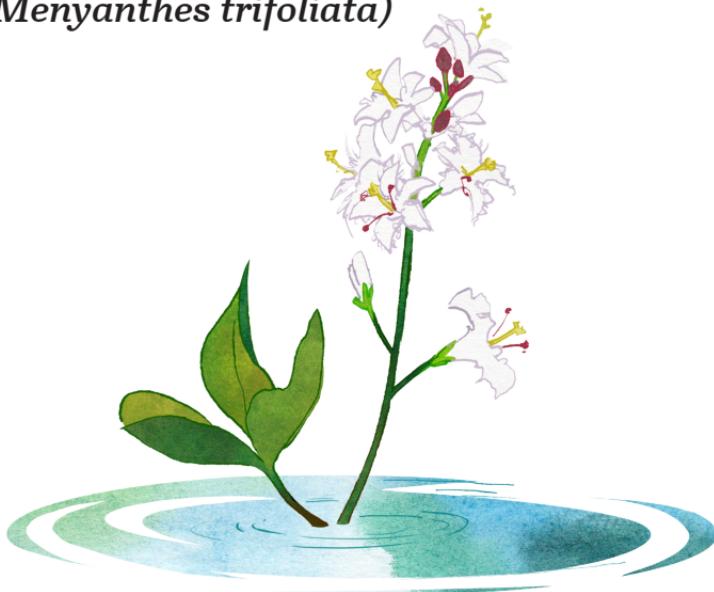
Eyebright is famous for its medicinal value in treating conditions associated with the eyes.

A solution of eyebright applied as an eyewash or a compress can reduce inflammation from conjunctivitis, eyestrain, styes, and general eye irritation. The dried herb itself can be used in herbal smoking mixtures; the fumes of the smoked herbs are inhaled to treat chronic bronchitis. The natural astringent and antibacterial agents in eyebright are known to be effective in tightening porous oily skin and healing acne and irritated skin. Therefore, a simple remedy for acne is to apply an eyebright poultice, drink eyebright tea, or apply a tincture onto the affected skin.



# Bogbean

(*Menyanthes trifoliata*)



The Bogbean (also called Buckbean) is widely distributed herb in Scotland, with its natural habitat being spongy bogs, marshes, and shallow water. Only the leaves, which have a very bitter taste, are used in herbal medicine.

Bogbean is best known for stimulating the appetite and encouraging digestion. It is still used today as an effective remedy for rheumatoid arthritis, especially when accompanied by weakness, weight loss, and a lack of vitality.

## Glossary of Terms

**Astringent** – A substance or chemical compound that tends to shrink or constrict body tissues.

**Compress** – A pad of absorbent material pressed onto part of the body to relieve inflammation or stop bleeding.

**Decoction** – A method of extraction by the boiling of dissolved chemicals from herbal or plant material, which may include stems, roots, bark and rhizomes.

**Distill** – A method of extracting the essence of a plant by heating it with a solvent, usually with water.

**Eyewash** – A cleansing solution for the eyes.

**Infusion** – A drink, remedy, or extract prepared by soaking the leaves of a plant or herb in liquid.

**Poultice** – A soft, moist mass of material, typically of a plant or flour, applied to the body to relieve soreness and inflammation and kept in place with a cloth.

**Talisman** – An object that is thought to have magic powers and to bring good luck.

**Tincture** – A medicine made by dissolving a drug in alcohol.

**Tonic** – A medicinal substance taken to give a feeling of vigor or well-being.

