Iceland Moss (Icelandic: Fjallagrös)

Latin name: Cetraria islandica

Family: Parmeliaceae

Common all over Iceland

Parts used: entire lichen.

Harvesting: collected from the time the snow thaws in spring until the first snowfall in autumn. Easier to collect when it is wet rather than dry. Caution should be used when collecting so as not to take too much at one time as Iceland Moss takes about 5-10 years to reach maximum size. The plants tend to accumulate lead so important to collect in unpolluted areas.

Constituents: Lichen Acids (protolicheristic acid), polysaccharides, minerals (iron, calcium), fiber.

Action: Anti-inflammatory, demulcent, vulnerary, expectorant, nourishing, anti-emetic, antitussive, anthelmintic, laxative, antibacterial.

Uses: Iceland Moss is unique in that it contains both mucilage and bitters and is especially good for irritated or sore throats, as well as for stimulating digestion. Long tradition of use for coughs, throat infections, asthma, and bronchitis. Considered good for all manner of digestive issues where mucilage is soothing and protects the mucous membrane of the stomach and the bitters strengthen and stimulate digestion. Works well for indigestion, gastritis, stomach and duodenal ulcers, IBS, and constipation. Also considered good for eliminating worms. Iceland Moss is known to be good for nausea and to stimulate digestion after chronic illness. Topically, Iceland Moss compresses are used to heal wounds and treat rashes.

Dosage:

Tincture: 1-4ml three times per day (1:5, 25%)

Infusion: 1 teaspoon in a cup three times per day

Decoction: 1 teaspoon in a cup, boil for 3 minutes, allowed to stand for 10 minutes. 1 cup three times per day

Syrup: 1-2 teaspoons three times per day

Infusions, decoctions, tinctures, compresses, and ointments for external use.

Contraindication: Iceland Moss has been known to cause allergic reactions such as nausea and stomach pain, but this is rare.

Iceland Moss is actually a lichen which lives symbiotically with fungi and algae. It also grows in many parts of Europe, but its name is associated with Iceland in Latin, English, Danish, French, and German. It has been used for centuries in cooking and as a medicinal herb. The first reference to the use of Iceland Moss in Iceland can be found in the Icelandic second law code known as “Jónsbók”. Iceland Moss was quite valuable and was used as currency, the law code stated that the collections of Iceland Moss on another’s land was prohibited. Going up into the mountains to collect it before the onset of winter is a deep-rooted Icelandic custom. Iceland Moss is used in breads, blood pudding, cough syrups, soups, porridges, and drinks as weel as for dyeing yarn.

An excerpt about Iceland Moss from Björn Halldórsson’s, *The Uses of Herbs*, 1783: “This grass, or rightly, moss, is best for healing tuberculosis as well as all bloating, all crudities and other ailments of the stomach. It has often been confirmed that a half a meal of this moss with milk, well-prepared, has kept the health, strength and stamina of men longer than most other food. The bitters, which are on the leaves of the moss, soften feces or cause diarrhea, and thus foreigners have called this moss Catharticus. But the bitterness goes if it is soaked in water for a while before eating. Drinking a decoction of this moss like tea is good for bloating and worms in the stomach or intestines of man. Moss porridge, boiled thoroughly into a mash, with milk, is a very nourishing and strengthening food and cures diarrhea.”

Iceland Moss Soup:

25g Iceland Moss

1 liter milk

1 tablespoon brown sugar

Salt

Clean the lichen thoroughly, squeeze the water out of it and chop finely. Put milk in a pot and bring to a boil. Add the lichen and sugar. Simmer for 5-10 minutes. Add salt. (Nanna Rögnvaldardóttir, *Matarást*, 1998.)

Róbertsdóttir, Anna Rósa, *Icelandic Herbs and Their Medicinal Uses*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA, 2016, pp. 110-112.