

COWBRIDGE PHYSIC GARDEN Information notes

Borage

Latin name: *Borago officinalis*



Common names: Burrage, common bugloss, star flower, beebread, bee plant

Description: Borage is a hardy annual plant with a very hairy, bristly surface. The stems are branched and hollow and the large leaves pointed and oval in shape. Borage has beautiful bright blue star shaped flowers that are very attractive to bees and beneficial insects. It propagates itself easily from its large almost black seeds.

History: Borage has been grown in the UK since at least 1200 and is possibly a British native plant. Most plants available centuries ago would have been grown for their medicinal and edible uses. The young tops of the plant sometimes boiled and the young leaves used in salads (the larger old leaves are hairy and horrid!) The herb has a taste similar to cucumber, and the leaves steeped in water were used to make a refreshing drink. Our great grandmothers might have preserved and candied the flowers for decorative uses in the kitchen.

INFORMATION NOTES

Medicinal uses: It has been suggested that one of the origins of the name "Borage" is *barrach* a Celtic word meaning Man of Courage. Among many medicinal uses, the plant was traditionally used to support the Adrenal glands, and it is confirmed that the plant encourages the production of adrenaline, helping the body to cope with stressful situations. An infusion of fresh leaves can be used as a tonic for stress, mental exhaustion and depression. The saline content of the plant promotes the activity of the kidneys and the anti-inflammatory properties make it useful to treat infections. Externally, irritated eyes can be soothed by an eyewash made from the leaves and a compress or poultice helps inflamed swollen areas of the body.

Other uses: A blue dye can be made from the flowers. Borage was often grown near to beehives as the flowers yield excellent honey.

Uses today: The seed of the Borage plant is one of the most important sources of Gamma-linoleic acid (GLA). The level of GLA in Borage is higher than in Evening Primrose and the fact that it is much easier to cultivate makes it a very popular medicinal herb. Clinical trials have shown that this oil can be beneficial in the treatment of skin and heart conditions and combined with Evening primrose oil can help reduce blood cholesterol levels.

Additional information: The name of the plant is thought to derive from a number of sources apart from the Celtic one previously mentioned. One is the Italian *borra* or French *bourra* meaning rough hair or wool, presumably referring to the hairy covering of the plant.

Further reading:
David Hoffmann. Holistic Herbal
Richard Mabey. The Complete New Herbal

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