Comfrey

Latin Name: *Symphytum officinale*

Also known as: Knitbone, Bruisewort, Woundwort, Slippery Root, Boneset, Gum Plant, Nipbone, Knitback, Salsify, Wallwort, Blackwort, Black Root

Scientific Classification

Family: Boraginaceae – borage family
Genus: Symphytum – comfrey
Species: *S. officinale* – common comfrey

Influence on the Body	(PRINCIPLE ACTIONS are listed in CAPITAL LETTERS)
Blood and Circulatory System	BLOOD CLEANSER • ANEMIA • hemorrhage • styptic (contracts blood vessels)
Body System	tonic (increases energy and strength) • fatigue • energy • astringent (tightens and tones) • MUCOUS MEMBRANES • mucilage (soft and slippery sugar molecules that protect mucous membranes and inflamed tissues) • demulcent (softens and soothes inflammation of mucous membranes)
Bones and Teeth	BROKEN BONES • FRACTURES
Cancer	cancer • tumors
Digestive Tract	nutritive (supplies nutrients and aids in building and toning the body) • bitter (stimulates digestive juices and improves appetite) • DIGESTION • digestive problems • stomach • ulcers • ULCERATED BOWELS • diarrhea • dysentery • laxative • colon • colitis • hemorrhoids
Endocrine System	pancreas
Eyes	painful or injured EYES
First Aid	BRUISES • SORES • gangrenous sores • SPRAINS • pulled tendons • SWELLINGS • BURNS • WOUNDS • CUTS • CELL PROLIFERANT (enhances the formation of new tissue) • INSECT BITES • BEE STINGS • GANGRENE
Infections and Immune System	ALLERGIES • HAY FEVER • COUGHS • colds • fevers • INFECTIONS • YEAST INFECTION • HERPES • ATHLETE'S FOOT

Inflammation	INFLAMMATIONS • ARTHRITIS • rheumatism • GOUT • BURSITIS
Liver	gall bladder
Lungs and Respiratory System	respiratory problems • dissolves and expels mucus • expectorant (loosens and removes phlegm in the respiratory tract) • sinusitis • BRONCHITIS • CONGESTION • moistens LUNGS • asthma • pneumonia • pleurisy • EMPHYSEMA • tuberculosis
Mouth and Throat	COLD SORES • MOUTHWASH • bleeding gum disease • pyorrhea • throat • hoarseness • gargle • tonsillitis
Muscles	leg cramps
Pain	PAIN • headache
Reproductive System	*Female:* • sore breasts • female disorders • menstruation • leucorrhea • vaginal discharge • VAGINAL DOUCHE
Skin, Tissues & Hair	SKIN • ACNE • BOILS • eczema • psoriasis • diaper rash • ITCHING • dandruff
Urinary Tract	kidneys • kidney stones • BLADDER PROBLEMS • bloody urine

Key Properties:

• *<u>VULNERARY</u> – promotes cell regeneration in damaged bones and tissues by stimulating cellular growth and warding off infection*

• *<u>DEMULCENT</u> – soothes inflammation of mucous membranes*

• *<u>EXPECTORANT</u> – loosens and removes phlegm in the respiratory tract*

• *<u>alterative</u> – purifies the blood, cleanses, and induces efficient removal of waste products*

• *<u>astringent</u> – increases the tone and firmness of tissues, reduces mucous discharge from the nose, intestines, vagina and draining sores*

• *<u>nutritive</u> – supplies substantial amounts of nutrients and aids in building and toning the body*

Primarily affecting: *BONES • TISSUES • MUCOUS MEMBRANES • LUNGS*

History	Comfrey was a well known healer for both people and animals as early as 400 BC. It was noted for its ability to promote tissue repair.

Comfrey's genus name ‘symptium’ is the Greek word meaning to unite, and 'comfrey' is a corruption of ‘con firma’, alluding to the uniting of bones. Dioscorides, a Greek physician, used the plant to heal wounds and mend broken bones. The Greeks and Romans made poultices out of comfrey leaves and roots to treat external wounds, and they drank comfrey tea for stomach disorders, internal bleeding, diarrhea, bronchial problems, and other ailments.

Through the ages, comfrey continued to be a popular treatment for a wide variety of ailments. It was considered a gentle remedy for diarrhea and dysentery, an effective treatment for bronchitis, whooping cough and tuberculosis, and used in cases of internal bleeding, ulcers and hemorrhoids. Ointments and other preparations of the roots and leaves were applied to bruises, sprains, strains, broken bones, torn ligaments, severe cuts, boils and burns, arthritis, gangrene, and almost any kind of inflamed swelling.

Native Americans discovered the healing qualities of comfrey and used it with other herbs.

Farmers have long fed comfrey to their livestock for various ailments or as a spring tonic after a long winter of standing in barnyard mire beneath overcast skies. Farmers have also fed comfrey to their families as a nearly unparalleled source of protein, potassium, calcium, and Vitamins A, B12, and C. The general rule was “if anything is broken, use comfrey.”

Our family's use of comfrey is quite extensive. My Mom bought a small comfrey plant 45 years ago from a local health food store. She was told it could help my little brother, Phil, with his weakened lung condition that kept landing him in the hospital. Mom would cut the leaves from the plant and put them in the blender with some pineapple juice. He immediately started to heal. From that point on, he never had to go back into the hospital for lung problems. Eventually, he stopped taking comfrey altogether, as it seemed his lungs had healed.

Fast forward to 1990. Phil was in the Desert Storm War. He started having severe respiratory problems and the Army was considering a medical discharge for him. Our Mom sent him a package of dried comfrey leaves from her garden and in no time, Phil's lungs began repairing. He just recently retired from the Army.

My Dad planted comfrey in our backyard and Mom always

	fed comfrey to us kids, especially when we were sick or had a broken bone. When it died down in the winter, he roto-tilled it into the ground, in preparation for next years garden. In the spring, my parents were surprised to be greeted by hundreds of comfrey plants all over the yard. A day hardly goes by that my Mom and Dad don't eat comfrey in some form, whether dried and put into a tea, or processed fresh in a blender with juice as a 'green smoothie'. Wherever they have moved, they have taken it with them. **Since 2001, comfrey preparations made only for topical use have been approved for sale in the United States.**
Attributes	*Key Components: (including, but not limited to)* Vitamins A (carotene) • B12 (cobalamin, high concentrations) • C • E Calcium • Copper • Iron • Magnesium • Phosphorous • Potassium • Sulfur • Zinc Mucilage (helps in healing) • Chlorophyll • Bitter • Allantoin (stimulates cell growth, also found in aloe vera) • Proteins • Alkaloids (thought by some to be toxic to liver when taken internally in large amounts. It is found in the root and young leaves, see Safety section.)
Cell Regeneration	Comfrey contains allantoin (a cell proliferant) which stimulates new cell growth and rapid healing of tissues and bone. It reduces or eliminates scar tissue and accelerates the healing of sprains, wounds, and broken or fractured bones. Comfrey is well known as the 'bone knitter.' The extract of comfrey poured into a cleaned wound can close it (often avoiding stitches).
Wound Healing	As a 'contact healer', comfrey relieves pain and starts to repair and heal on contact. It soothes inflammations on skin, in joints and pulled muscles, and in mucous membranes of the digestive tract and lungs. Swelling is checked and bleeding and hemorrhaging is arrested by comfrey's astringent and capillary constricting properties. Comfrey will join cleanly, even when bones have been badly set or will not heal. Comfrey is applied as a poultice to cuts and abrasions, sore breasts, burns, sprains, and bites. A hot poultice of the fresh, bruised leaves helps ease the pain of gout, bursitis and joint inflammations (often within an hour). Nothing compares with comfrey's healing effects on traumatic eye

	injuries. When comfrey extract is applied topically to mosquito bites, the itching stops and the swelling goes down. The extract is easily applied to help heal acne, sores and athlete's foot.
Women	Use poultices on sore, full (with infection) or caked breasts to very quickly relieve the tenderness as the tissues are soothed and healed. Comfrey teas and extracts have been used as a douche for yeast infections.
Anti-Bacterial	In a study on the effectiveness of comfrey to hinder streptococcus agalactia and staphylococcal bacteria, Daniel O. Noorlander demonstrated when comfrey extract was introduced topically to the bacteria, the walls of the bacteria cells weakened and then burst, destroying the bacteria within 20-30 minutes.
Internal Preparations Banned (2001)	Comfrey-containing herbal products for internal consumption were banned in the United States in 2001. Topical preparations are still available. (see discussion in Safety section) *Comfrey has been used historically for the following internal applications:* Comfrey was used to normalize the calcium-phosphorus balance, promoting healthy skin and strong bones. It was used to feed the pituitary with its natural hormones and help regulate blood sugar levels by supporting the pancreas.
Mucous Membranes	Comfrey has an abundance of mucilage, which gives it the ability to calm inflammation and soothe mucous membranes of the digestive and respiratory tracts.
Digestive Tract	Comfrey was used to promote the secretion of pepsin (to aid digestion) and soothe inflammatory disorders of the gastrointestinal tract (including ulcers and dysentery). It was used as a mild laxative to expel wastes.
Respiratory System	Comfrey was used as a healer of the respiratory system, acting as a general stimulant to the mucous membranes and helping to increase expectoration. It was considered to be a powerful remedy for coughs, throat and bronchial tubes, and was used to stop the hemorrhaging of weakened lungs.

Herb Parts Used	Leaves and root harvested anytime during the growth cycle, but preferably not when in full flower, used fresh or dried.
Preparations and Remedies	As a poultice, bruise the fresh leaves and apply to burns, wounds, bites, sprains, swellings, sore breasts, and gangrene. The tea and decoction may also be used as a fomentation.
Infusions	*Comfrey Tea:* Steep leaves for 30 minutes *Comfrey Root Decoction:* Simmer the dried, cut root for 30 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to sit for at least 8 hours. Re-heat uncovered, simmering to concentrate until desired strength is achieved (approximately 10-15 minutes). *Mullein Decoction:* (see MULLEIN preparations)
Syrup	*Cough Syrup:* (see SLIPPERY ELM preparations)
Wash	*Comfrey Tea Wash:* The tea used as a wash is especially helpful for skin ailments that cover large areas, such as a sunburn or wide spread topical staph infection. Slowly pour the infusion over the injury allowing excess liquid to drip into a basin or bathtub. Let the infusion remain on the site for a few minutes without washing it off or drying with a towel. *Soothing Eye Compress:* (see EYEBRIGHT preparations)
Fomentations	Comfrey leaves subdue every kind of inflammatory swelling when used as a fomentation (towel soaked in infusion or decoction and placed on affected area).
Poultices	Plantain works synergistically with comfrey in poultice and fomentation applications. Plantain absorbs toxins and poisons and is particularly helpful in cases of itching, skin irritation, rash, and discomfort. Comfrey has been used to ease the pain of gout and inflamed joints. There are several ways to prepare an effective comfrey poultice. Here are a few: 1. Bruise the fresh leaves and apply directly to burns, wounds, bites, sprains, swellings, sore breasts, and gangrene.

2. An easy poultice may be made by spooning dried comfrey leaves or powder into a large 'empty' tea bag and sealing the open edge. (Open-ended tea bags are made to be filled and ironed shut.) Moisten the closed comfrey 'tea bag' in hot water and lay on the injury when cooled enough to touch. The tea bag may be reheated in hot water several times and reapplied.

3. Put fresh leaves and/or root in a blender (or food processor) with a small amount of water, and then grind into a paste for direct application.

4. If you have dried, powdered comfrey, just mix it with a little water so that it makes a thick, slimy paste before applying.

5. Brew a decoction (strong tea) by first boiling 2 cups of water, then chopping up a cup of fresh comfrey leaves and/or root (or a half-cup of dried plant material). Use fresh plants when they are available. Reduce the heat to a simmer and then cook slowly for about 20 minutes.

Allow decoction to cool before applying it to the skin. Use a towel with plastic wrap or adhesive tape to hold the poultice in place. Leave in place for up to several hours or even overnight. Re-apply a fresh poultice the following day if needed.

Flaxseed Poultice: (see FLAXSEED preparations)

Comfrey/Plantain Poultice: (see CAYENNE preparations)

Boils and Abscess Poultice: (see ECHINACEA preparations)

Salves

Drawing Salve:
The drawing qualities of this salve make it useful to pull out the last bit of infection from scabbed-over wounds, to soothe and accelerate healing. As with any salve, it is best to let wounds drain and close on their own before sealing them off with the salve.

1 oz. Plantain leaves, crushed or powdered
1 oz. Comfrey root, powdered
4 oz. Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1/4 oz. Beeswax
Note: It is possible to make more than one batch at a time.

Heat oil in crock pot on the warm setting. Temperature

should not reach higher than 80-100˚ F. Stir in herbs and maintain this temperature (with a lid on) for 1-3 days, stirring occasionally.

When mixture is ready (partially determined by the loss of herb color and smell), line a colander with two layers of unbleached broadcloth or muslin. Place the colander inside a collector bowl and pour in the contents of the crock pot. Strain and squeeze out all possible oil into the collector bowl (you may want to use gloves while squeezing). Return the used herbs (left inside the cloth) to the soil or discard them.

Return the herb-infused oil to the wiped down, clean crock-pot. Cut in the beeswax and slowly heat until melted (beeswax liquefies at 148.4° F). Once melted, turn off the heat. To determine if enough beeswax has been added, spoon a small amount onto a plate to cool. The room temperature consistency should be gel-like, without liquefying. In warmer climates, it is necessary to add additional beeswax to set up properly. When satisfied, pour mixture into clean ointment jars (1-2 ounce jars are a convenient size for single or family use). This salve lasts up to 3 years in the refrigerator, or for several months when stored at room temperature.

Lobelia Salve: (see LOBELIA preparations)

Safety

In the late 1970s, researchers raised concerns about a toxic alkaloid found in the root and young leaves of comfrey, which may cause liver damage when taken in large amounts (more than the liver can process and eliminate at one time).

In 2001, the FDA (Federal Drug Administration) banned comfrey from all commercially produced herbal supplements to be taken internally.

Bear in mind that the FDA decided to ban the plant only after injecting unnaturally large amounts of the plant's extracted alkaloids into animal test subjects, which then died of liver failure or got cancer (just as they would have done had the alkaloids been extracted from a carrot, and then concentrated and injected into the animal's blood streams). "Scientists that did the original experiments, did tell the news media later that when the product (comfrey) was given to the rats in its whole and natural state, that this did not happen." Jack Ritchason N.D.

Plant Profile	*Natural Habitat:* Comfrey is native to Europe, growing in damp grassy places, and is widespread throughout the British Isles and Asia on river banks and ditches. It is naturalized in much of North America.
Description	This large perennial herb (plant grows back from a persistent rootstock in the spring after dying down in the winter) grows from two to four feet. The stalk is hollow and hairy with large, dark green, hairy leaves that reach ten to twelve inches long near the base, and grow smaller the higher they are on the stalk. The joints of the stalk divide into many branches. At the ends of the branches, comfrey bears white, cream, purple or pink clusters of drooping, bell-shaped flowers in May through summer, after which come small black seeds in August. The slick quality of its rhizome (principal root which is black with a juicy white flesh within), gives rise to its nickname of slippery root. It contains a large amount of mucialge (soft and slippery material) and is rich in easily assimilated organic calcium, with a bland and faintly astringent taste. Comfrey's other name, knit-bone, comes from its use in healing bones and tissues.
Growing Comfrey	*Planting:* Comfrey can be grown in the spring by direct seed planting, cuttings at any stage of the life cycle, or root division in the fall. Sow seeds just under the surface and tamp in securely. Keep warm and moist until germination, which takes approximately ten days. Seedlings may be grown in pots for about three months, then transplanted to the garden about three feet apart. Comfrey prefers a full to part sun position (shaded plants will be smaller and have fewer blossoms), with rich, moist, but well-drained soil, and has a cold hardiness to 15° F. Sandy soil is fine, as long as the plants are watered consistently during the growing season (fleshy herbs like comfrey need a great deal of water). Divide the plants every few years to prevent crowding. Cutting the flowers will encourage more leaf growth. Comfrey is generally trouble free once established, although weaker or stressed plants may suffer from rust or mildew. These fungal diseases rarely reduce plant growth seriously and thus do not generally require control. Infected plants

	should not be used for propagation purposes. The plant dies down over the winter, but makes a strong recovery in the spring. Comfrey can be quite invasive in the garden, overrunning other plants once it takes hold. To avoid this, cut them back when they make flowers, and mulch the crowns with their own stems, leaves and flowers. This will keep the seed from maturing and dropping, and will quickly improve the soil and make large and healthy plants. Comfrey can form an attractive backdrop to other plants when they are confined to distant parts of the garden.
Removing Comfrey	It is difficult to remove comfrey once it is established, as it has deep roots, and any fragments left in the soil will regrow. The best way to eradicate comfrey is to carefully dig it out, removing as much of the root as possible. This is best done in hot, dry summer weather, when dry conditions help to kill any remaining root stumps.
Harvesting & Storage	Mature comfrey plants may be harvested up to four or five times a year once they are about two feet high. It is said that the *best* time to cut comfrey is shortly before flowering, for this is when the leaves are at their peak potency. Pinch off leaves, or cut the entire plant down to about two inches above the ground. Dry and store in airtight containers. Leaves may be frozen for up to six months. The roots should be unearthed in the spring or fall. Split the roots down the middle and dry them in moderate temperatures on screens or in an oven. Store roots in airtight containers.