

# Eyebright

Latin Name: *Euphrasia officinalis*

Also known as: Red Eyebright, Eyewort, Clear Eye, See Bright

## Scientific Classification

The genus Euphrasia is a complex plant group with up to 170 named species, many separated by minute technical details. *E. officinalis* is represented most often in literature. Other species seem to be similar in their chemical makeup and are generally considered by herbalists collectively as *Euphrasia officinalis*.

*Family:* Scrophulariaceae – figwort family  
*Genus:* Euphrasia – eyebright  
*Species:* *E. officinalis* – common eyebright

Influence on the Body	(PRINCIPLE ACTIONS are listed in CAPITAL LETTERS)
<i>Blood and Circulatory System</i>	BLOOD CLEANSER
<i>Blood Sugar</i>	DIABETES
<i>Body System</i>	tonic (increases energy and strength throughout the body) • astringent (increases the tone and firmness of tissues, lessens mucous discharge from the nose, intestines, vagina and draining sores)
<i>Digestive Tract</i>	bitter (stimulates digestive juices and improves appetite) • digestive disorders • ulcers
<i>Ears</i>	EARACHE • middle ear problems
<i>Eyes</i>	EYE strengthening • EYE STRAIN • VISION AID • EYE INFECTIONS • PINK EYE • dissolves styes • EYE DISORDERS • CONJUNCTIVITIS • CATARACTS • GLAUCOMA
<i>Infections and Immune System</i>	ALLERGIES • COLDS • hay fever
<i>Inflammation</i>	anti-inflammatory
<i>Liver</i>	LIVER STIMULANT • jaundice
<i>Mouth, Nose &amp; Throat</i>	anti-catarrh (helps heal inflamed mucous membranes with discharge, especially affecting nose and throat) • congestion • coughs • RUNNY NOSE • sinus congestion • SNEEZING

*Nervous System*

- sore throat
- memory • headache

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**Key Properties:**

- ALTERATIVE – cleanses the blood and induces efficient removal of waste products
- astrigent – tightens and constricts tissues, reduces swelling
- antiseptic
- tonic – increases energy and strength throughout the body

**Primarily affecting:** EYES • MUCOUS MEMBRANES • liver • blood

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**History**

The word 'Euphrasia' is of Greek origin, derived from 'euphrosyne', meaning gladness. It is believed the plant acquired this name because of its reputation for curing eye ailments. It brought much gladness by preserving the eyesight of the sufferer. Though known and named by the Greeks, there is little history of its medicinal use until the 1300s, when it was ascribed to cure "all evils of the eye".

Euphrasia was regarded as a treatment in diseases of the eyes by the great herbalists of the 1500s (Tragus, Fuschsius, Dodoens, etc).

The 'Doctrine of Signatures' was a popular theory during the 1500s and 1600s. It was believed that the way a plant looked indicated the ailments for which it should be used in herbal medicine. With the flower's spots and stripes, eyebright became known, under this discipline, for resembling bloodshot eyes – initiating or adding to its traditional use as an herbal aid for the eyes.

In Queen Elizabeth's time (1533-1603) there was a type of ale called 'Eyebright Ale.' In '*Paradise Lost*' (published in 1667), the poet Milton relates that the Archangel Michael used eyebright to cure Adam of the eye infliction caused by his eating the forbidden fruit.

"Eyebright," says Salmon (1671), "clears the sight and strengthens the head, eyes and memory." Nicholas Culpeper (English botanist, herbalist, physician, and astrologer, 1616-1654) extolled the herb's virtues as being

neglected; if people had been using it more, there would be much less need of spectacles.

For centuries, eyebright has been depended upon as an herb of choice for various eye disorders.

In Iceland, the expressed juice is used for most ailments of the eye, and in Scotland, the Highlanders make an infusion of the herb in milk for weak or inflamed eyes.

Herbalists continue to use eyebright as an herb of choice for a wide variety of eye disorders, sinus and cold infections.

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**Attributes**

Key Components: (including, but not limited to)

Vitamins A • B1 (thiamine) • B2 (riboflavin) • B3 (niacin) • B5 (pantothenic acid) • B6 (pyridoxine) • B9 (folic acid) • B12 (cobalamin) • Biotin • Choline • Inositol • PABA (Para-Amino Benzoic Acid) • C • D • E

Copper • Iron • Zinc • other Trace Minerals

Bitter • Tannic Acid • Flavonoids • Iridoid Glucosides (including Aucubin) • Volatile Oils

Some of these compounds have antibacterial and anti-inflammatory effects.

**Eyes**

Eyebright is used for relieving red, itchy or inflamed eyes, and for healing styes. When it is used as an eyewash, it tends to prevent excessive secretion of fluids, to relieve discomfort from eye strain and minor irritation, and to rejuvenate tired eyes.

It is excellent for weak eyesight. Eyebright strengthens and soothes the eyes, often improving eyesight (even in advanced years), and retards or reverses cataracts.

Eyebright is excellent for acute or chronic inflammations of the eyes, including over-sensitivity to light. It helps with eyes that are cloudy and irritated with mucous lacrymation (excessive tearing). It has antiseptic properties that fight eye infections.

Poultices, and eye-washes of eyebright are used for eye complaints associated with conjunctivitis (inflammation and the mucous membranes covering the eyeball and inside the eyelids) surrounding blood vessels, and as a preventive measure against mucous build-up. Taken internally,

<p><i>Mucous Membranes</i></p> <p><i>Liver</i></p> <p><i>Anti-inflammation</i></p>	<p>eyebright supports and strengthens eye health and healing.</p> <p>Eyebright is used with excellent results for problems relating to mucous membranes of the nose and sinuses. It works as a vaso-constrictor and astringent to nasal and conjunctiva (around eyes) mucus. It brings relief in frequent sneezing bouts. A concentrated tincture every two hours is specific for acute nasal and sinus congestions, attacks of hay fever, and colds.</p> <p>Eyebright is used in all mucous diseases accompanied by increased discharge, and for coughs, hoarseness, ear-aches, and headaches associated with head colds. It has been used to clear a foggy head and improve memory.</p> <p>Eyebright is known to stimulate and detoxify the liver, and clean the blood. It is used in Europe as an astringent tonic in the treatment of jaundice.</p> <p>Eyebright is high in iridoid glycosides such as aucubin. In several laboratory studies, aucubin has been found to be hepatoprotective (liver protective) and possesses antimicrobial activity. (1)(2)(3)</p> <p>Several iridoid glycosides have been isolated from eyebright (particularly aucubin), which possess anti-inflammatory properties comparable to those of Indomethacin (a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug). (4)</p>
<p><b>Herb Parts Used</b></p>	<p>The entire above-ground plant</p>
<p><b>Preparations and Remedies</b></p> <p><i>Infusions</i></p> <p><i>Eyewash</i></p>	<p>The dried herb is used whole, cut and sifted for infusions, tinctures, and is powdered to put into capsules, tablets, and other preparations.</p> <p>The tea may be used as an eyewash or taken internally. It is particularly effective in combination with other herbs and often used with golden seal.</p> <p><i>Eyebright Tea:</i> Steep a heaping teaspoonful of the leaves into a cup of boiling water for half an hour. When cold, drink one or two cups a day. Four fluid ounces of the infusion taken every morning on an empty stomach, and every night at bed-time, has been found successful in relieving epilepsy.</p> <p><b><i>For all preparations that go directly into or on the eyes, it is essential to keep utensils, containers and preparations clean and sterile.</i></b></p>

*Simple Eyewash:*

This eyewash is for tired, strained eyes. It cleanses the tear ducts and stimulates circulation.

1 Tablespoon Eyebright herb  
1 Cup Distilled Water

Boil water and remove from heat. Add eyebright and let steep (covered) for ten minutes. Strain through a muslin cloth or unbleached coffee filter, cool until lukewarm. Fill sterile eyecup with cooled solution, tip your head back, letting the solution wash the eye as you blink several times.

Always discard used solution, and refill eyecup with fresh solution. Apply to the same eye three separate times, then re-sterilize eyecup (to avoid cross-contamination infections from eye to eye) and repeat procedure on the other eye. The eyewash should be made fresh each application, as it does not store well in the refrigerator.

*Eyebright – Goldenseal Eye Wash:*  
(see GOLDENSEAL preparations)

*Fomentations*

*Eye Wash or Fomentations:*

Use eye herbs in a tea, strain and then use as an eyewash or fomentation (towel soaked in infusion and placed on affected area). Use alternating hot and cold fomentations over the eyes several times daily. This eyewash has been used for babies who have clogged tear ducts and by people with cataract problems.

When there is great discomfort, it is considered desirable to use a warm infusion rather more frequently for inflamed eyes, until resolved. In most cases, the cool application is sufficient.

*Eye Compress*

*Soothing Eye Compress:*

1 Tablespoon Eyebright herb  
1/2 Tablespoon powdered Comfrey root  
1/2 Tablespoon Golden Seal root powder  
1 pint Distilled Water

Make a tea by stirring comfrey and golden seal into the water and bringing to a boil. Turn down heat to simmer (keeping covered) for ten minutes, remove from heat and add eyebright. Leave lid on and steep for ten more minutes.

	<p>In cases of tired or inflamed eyes, a compress can relieve symptoms, relax the eye muscles, and improve vision. Prepare the compress by putting cotton into the bowl of a wooden spoon and wrapping it with gauze. Strain the tea, dip the spoon into it, and apply it to the eye. In the case of styes, the mixture may be applied while still fairly warm (to tolerance) and alternated with cold applications, to encourage drainage of the infection. For this procedure, separate the tea into two vessels; leave one covered to stay hot and put ice cubes in the other.</p>
<p><b>Safety</b></p>	<p>No health hazards or adverse side effects are known.</p>
<p><b>Plant Profile</b></p> <p><i>Description</i></p> <p><i>Growing Eyebright</i></p>	<p><i>Natural Habitat:</i> Native to Europe and some parts of western Asia, eyebright grows wild in grasslands, meadows and pastures. It is now cultivated in North America as well.</p> <p>Eyebright is a low creeping annual (must grow from new seed each year) with a rising black-green stem that is one to nine inches in height (depending on growing conditions and species), with fanlike, bristle-toothed leaves and several flowers.</p> <p>The leaves are downy, and appear in twos, opposite each other below and alternate above. The small, whitish flowers are two-lipped (with the top lip/petal being slightly hooded). The petals have a yellow throat with marked purple stripes. Flowers appear June through September and are followed by an oblong pod, filled with numerous seeds. The plant essentially lacks odor, but has a bitter, salty, astringent taste.</p> <p>The root is long, small and thready at the end with suckers that spread out and attach to surrounding grassplant roots to share in their nutrients as a semi-parasitic symbiote. The grass thus preyed upon does not suffer very much. Penetration is slight and there is no permanent drain of strength, as eyebright dies out each year.</p> <p>Earlier herbal literature sometimes describes a red-flowered eyebright, which is now considered to be a different, though related, plant.</p> <p>The plant prefers full sun to part shade and rich, moist soils. It draws on the strength of other plants (particularly grasses), but some species are less dependant than others. To plant, press seeds firmly into the surface of soil in fall or very early</p>

spring. A period of cold, moist conditioning improves germination. The seed produces a low germination rate the first year, achieving a better rate the second year. There is a survival advantage to splaying germination out over a couple of years and extended dormancy of this sort is fairly common with wild (undomesticated) seeds.

*Harvesting*

Eyebright is best gathered when it is in flower and cut just above the root.

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