

Blessed Thistle

Latin Name: *Cnicus benedictus*

Also known as: St. Benedict Thistle, Spotted Thistle, Bitter Thistle, Cardin, Blessed Cardus, Holy Thistle

Scientific Classification

Blessed Thistle is classified in other genus and species combinations.
The same plant (or closely related), with various names.

Family: Asteraceae – aster, daisy and sunflower family
Compositae – in earlier classifications

Genus: Cnicus

Species: *C. benedictus* – The sole species in the genus Cnicus is this thistle-like plant

Other classifications commonly used:

Genus /Species: *Carduus sanctus*, *Carduus benedictus*

Genus /Species: *Carbenia benedicta*

Genus /Species: *Centaurea benedicta*

Influence on the Body	(PRINCIPAL ACTIONS are listed in CAPITAL LETTERS)
<i>Blood and Circulatory System</i>	strengthens HEART • ANGINA (chest pains) • dropsy (edema due to heart insufficiency) • BLOOD PURIFIER • BLOOD CIRCULATION • circulation to the BRAIN
<i>Body System</i>	STIMULANT TONIC (increases energy and strength throughout the body) • diaphoretic (promotes perspiration, increasing elimination through the skin)
<i>Cancer</i>	CANCER
<i>Digestive Tract</i>	stimulates appetite • DIGESTIVE DISORDERS • carminative (brings warmth, circulation, relieves intestinal gas discomfort, and promotes peristalsis) • GAS • CONSTIPATION • emetic (causes vomiting in large doses) • anthelmintic (kills parasites and worms) • expels worms
<i>Infections and Immune System</i>	reduces FEVER • spleen
<i>Inflammation</i>	arthritis
<i>Liver</i>	LIVER CONDITIONS • jaundice • GALLBLADDER • cholagogue (promotes the flow of bile)

<i>Lungs and Respiratory System</i>	strengthens LUNGS • respiratory infection
<i>Nervous System</i>	nervine (improves nerve function) • STRENGTHENS MEMORY • inability to concentrate • DEPRESSION • senility • HEADACHES • migraine headaches • HYSTERIA
<i>Reproductive System</i>	<i>Female:</i> • HORMONE BALANCER • FEMALE HORMONES • FEMALE DISORDERS • MENSTRUAL CRAMPS • painful MENSTRUATION • EMMENAGOGUE (promotes menstrual flow) • birth control • leucorrhea (vaginal discharge due to infection) • vaginal discharge • PREGNANCY • enriches BREAST MILK • LACTATION • NURSING
<i>Urinary Tract</i>	kidneys • urinary disorders • diuretic (increases urine flow)

Key Properties:

- EMMENAGOGUE – promotes menstrual flow, safe during pregnancy in small amounts
- GALACTAGOGUE – enhances lactation of nursing mothers
- STOMACH TONIC • ALTERATIVE – purifies the blood
- TONIC • nervine – strengthens nerve function
- emetic – causes vomiting in large doses

Primarily affecting: STOMACH • HEART • BLOOD • BRAIN
• MAMMARY GLANDS • UTERUS

History	<p>Early herbalists believed that blessed thistle was a cure-all. They noted that the plant could prevent and stop headaches, provoke sweat, help memory, strengthen the heart and stomach, and treat external problems such as festering sores, boils and itching rashes. Blessed thistle has been utilized for many years for digestive problems, and for liver and gallbladder diseases.</p> <p>In 17th century England, the herbalist Culpepper listed blessed thistle for use in headaches, female complaints and fevers. European monks once grew blessed thistle as a cure for smallpox, which is when it is believed to have received its name.</p> <p>The Native American Quinault tribe used the whole plant to create a birth-control medicinal, and 19th century herbalists</p>
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recommended blessed thistle tea made from the plant tops as a treatment for fevers and respiratory ailments.

In herbal medicine today, blessed thistle is used as a 'female' herb (helping to nourish and balance female hormones), yet it is effective in balancing men's hormones as well. It aids in digestion and has health benefits derived from purifying blood and improving circulation.

Attributes

The 'bitter' principle was named 'cnicin' by Nativelle in 1839. He proposed that the reason bitter foods increased the appetite was due to the stimulation of the bitter taste buds on the tongue resulting in increased secretion of saliva and digestive juices. In turn, these secretions help protect the tissues found in the digestive tract, enhance bile flow and improve pancreatic functions.

Key Components: (including, but not limited to)

Cnicin (a 'bitter') • Other 'Bitter' components • Tannins

Blood Circulation

Blessed thistle is believed to have great power in improving blood circulation. It is such an excellent blood purifier, that drinking a cup of blessed thistle tea twice a day can alleviate chronic headaches over time and gradually detoxify the spleen, liver, kidneys, and bowels. Blessed thistle is good for all urinary, pulmonary and liver disorders. Better circulation also strengthens the heart, lungs, and brain functions. Blessed thistle acts as a brain food by bringing oxygen and nourishment to the cells and stimulating memory.

Women

Helping to balance female hormones, blessed thistle has been effective in relieving cramps, painful menstruation and menopausal headaches. When given to girls before the onset of puberty, it can help to prevent future cramping and menstrual problems.

Blessed thistle is used in formulas for pregnancy, not as the main herb, but as a supportive herb. Blessed thistle is wonderful for enriching and increasing milk production in nursing mothers (even more so when taken in combination with red raspberry).

Digestion

Blessed thistle has a long history of use as a digestive aid and general tonic. It improves the appetite, reduces gas in the intestines, relieves constipation, and helps to heal digestive liver problems. The leaves, dried and powdered, are good for expelling worms.

<i>Infections and Immune System</i>	Laboratory studies show that blessed thistle and its components (including cnicin) act against several types of bacteria and help to reduce and control fevers.
<i>Inflammation</i>	There is some evidence that blessed thistle also has anti-inflammatory properties.
<i>Cancer</i>	Along with other herbs, it has been taken internally to help the body heal cancer.
<i>Perspiration</i>	Blessed thistle can cause profuse perspiration when taken in a hot infusion. Perspiration cools down the body and helps it get rid of unwanted toxins through the skin.
Herb Parts Used	The leaves, stems, seeds, and flowers are used medicinally
Preparations and Remedies	The leaves and flowers may be eaten fresh like watercress, though the taste is very bitter. Fresh or dried parts of the blessed thistle plant may be made into an infusion tea (taken hot or cold), fluid extract, or dried and powdered to put into capsules singly or in combination with other herbs.
<i>Infusions</i>	<p>Taken as a cold infusion, blessed thistle is a tonic. When taken warm, it can induce perspiration and help normalize menstrual flow.</p> <p><i>Lactation Tea:</i> To enhance the quality and quantity of mother's milk, make a blessed thistle tea mixed with equal parts of red raspberry leaves, marshmallow root, goat's rue and fenugreek. Steep for several hours, strain, and then keep in the refrigerator to drink throughout the day. Take three or more cups per day according to need.</p> <p><i>Ginger Tea:</i> (see GINGER preparations)</p>
<i>Powdered Form</i>	The herb may be ground up and encapsulated. Take four to twenty capsules per day.
Safety	<p>During pregnancy, blessed thistle should be taken in small amounts and in combination with other pregnancy herbs. It is not to be taken alone or in large amounts during pregnancy.</p> <p>Taken in large doses, blessed thistle may induce vomiting. It is better to take smaller quantities, several times throughout the day.</p>

Plant Profile*Natural Habitat:*

Although native to southern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean region, blessed thistle is now cultivated in many areas of the world, including parts of North America. The herb prefers dry sunny places in arable, stony and waste ground areas, and is easily grown in ordinary garden soil.

Description

Blessed thistle is an annual plant (it germinates, flowers, sets seed, and dies within one year) growing up to two feet tall. It has leathery, hairy leaves up to a foot long and three inches broad with small spines on the margins. The plant produces numerous yellow flowers (about one inch in diameter) arranged in a head at the tip of a branch or stem. The flower is surrounded by long yellowish-red spines and almost hidden by upper leaves.

Blessed thistle is sometimes considered to be a noxious weed. The herb has a feeble, unpleasant odor and an intensely bitter taste, more disagreeable when fresh than in the dried plant.

The leaves and tops are at peak medicinal quality when the plant flowers appear, usually between May and August. For best potency, the harvested plant should be thoroughly and speedily dried in a well-ventilated, moisture-free, dark area.