**ACONITE**

*Aconitum napellus*
(a-kon-EYE-tum nap-ELL-us)

**Family:** Ranunculaceae

**Names:** queen mother of poisons, blue rocket, monkshood, wolf’s bane, black sea root, friar’s mantle, helmet flower, friar’s cap; Tojad (Polish)

**Description:** Perennial plant with conical tuberous taproot-like stock which is renewed annually lateral to the decaying parent tuber. Stems are stout up to 5 feet high, bearing leaves that are deeply incised almost to the base into 5-7 lobes; the lobes differ greatly in size and in shape from linear to broadly elliptical. Flowers are dark-blue, the posterior petal-like sepal as a helmet-shaped hood; arranged in a moderately dense inflorescence at the apex of the stem. Flowers June-September. The leaves can be mistaken for wild parsley

**Cultivation:** Aconite prefers rich cool soil, are tolerant of shade, but make better plants when grown in a sunny position. Soil should not dry out. Propagation is from seed o by division in spring or autumn and once the plants are established, they can be left alone. The flower spikes reach three feet or so and are strong, requiring staking only in the most exposed positions. Roots are harvested in the early autumn when they are firm and mature. Wear gloves when dividing clumps of aconite and be even more careful if there are cuts or scratches on the hands or arms. The harvested material is cleaned and if necessary broken up, then dried quickly at 42F to prevent the aconitine being hydrolyzed to the almost useless aconine. The odor is odorless and has a sweet, and later scratchy taste which causes a choking sensation.

**History:** The Latin name commemorates the hill Aconitus, in Pontica, where Hercules fought with Cerberus, the many-headed watchdog at the gates of the underworld. From Cerberus’s foam the plant supposedly sprang venomous with poison in all its parts, from flower to root. The English names of “helmet flower,” “monkshood,” and “old wife’s hood” allude to the shape of the blue flower. The name “wolf’s bane” belongs to *A.lycotonum*, a species with yellow flowers appearing later in the year. The name came because it was used as a poison bait for wolves in the 13th and 14th centuries. Herbal history holds that aconite was used to poison arrows. In Poland it’s called Slippers of the Blessed Mother.
Aconite’s deadly powers appear to have been exploited by women. According to one tale, women could build up an immunity to its poison by eating minute doses from childhood and then pass it on to their sexual partners with lethal results.

**Constituents:** terpenoid alkaloids (diterpenoid compounds: aconitine), organic acids (aconitic acid), starch, sugars, resin

**Actions:** acts on the central nervous system. Has a sedative action in certain neuralgias and in sciatica, febrifuge and is effective in illnesses of the respiratory trace resulting from chills; analgesic, antipyretic, local anesthetic

**Medicinal Uses:** Aconite is poisonous in all but the smallest doses and is rarely prescribed for internal use. More commonly, it is applied to unbroken skin to relieve pain from bruises or neurological conditions. In Ayurvedic medicine, aconite is used to treat neuralgia, asthma, and heart weakness. Aconite has been added to salves because of its painkilling action on neuralgia, lumbago, and rheumatism. The tincture has been given in one-drop doses for heart failure, high fevers, pneumonia, pleurisy and tonsillitis. Use only under a professional’s supervision.

**Homeopathic Use:** Homeopathic chemists use the fresh flowering spike, the flowers and the roots, which yield aconitine, as a febrifuge and to reduce the pulse rate. Used for sciatica, neuralgia and chills. It is also used for shock (especially after surgery or childbirth), chicken pox, measles, mumps, croup, toothache and teething.

**Toxicity:** A deadly poison at the wrong dosage. Ingestion of even 0.2-0.5 grams of the root that contains 1% aconitine may cause death to an adult.

**Ritual Uses:** Properties: funereal herbe, herbe of consecration, herbe of immortality, herbe of protection, visionary herbe. Aconite is one of the herbes used in traditional 20th witchcraft to consecrate the ritual knife. Its primary magickal use is in the consecration of magickal blades. An infusion provides the practitioner with a magickal wash and may be used with any ritual tool or sacred space. One of the herbes believed part of the legendary flying ointment, the symptoms of poisoning by aconite could lead the practitioner to experience sensations similar to flying. Aconite may be integrated into rituals of death and dying in a variety of ways ranging from tossing it into the fire, using it to aspurge the Circle, or through memorial plantings.

**Spiritual Properties:** Aconite may be carried as a talisman to maximize potential and overcome indifference and apathy. It will stimulate the fire within and help one to move out of fixed conditions. Medicinally, it offers freedom from suffering through its treatment of feverish pain and its use as a heart anodyne. The nature of aconite’s freedom is that of unconventional or nonordinary reality.

**Resources:**
- Companion Plants, [www.companionplants.com](http://www.companionplants.com)
- Crimson Sage, [http://www.crimson-sage.com](http://www.crimson-sage.com)
- Richters, [www.richters.com](http://www.richters.com) seeds, plants

**References:**

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