**ARNICA**

*Arnica montana*

[ARN-ee-kuh MON-tah-nuh]

**Family:** Asteraceae

**Common Names:** Leopard’s Bane; Wolf’s Eye; Wolf’s Yellow; Fallherb; Wellbestow; Prickherb; woundherb; snuffplant; Mountain Tobacco; Mountain Daisy, smokeherb; *tabaco de montana*; Thunderwort; Bilmes herb; strenghwort; St John’s-Strength Flower; Arnika, Wolfsgelega (German); Arnika, Pomornik Gorski (Polish); Tabac des Vosges, Herbe aux chutes, Souci des alpes, Bétoine des montagnes; Arnika, Bergwohlverleih, Waldblume, Donnerblume, Wolfsblume, Wolfstoterin; Alisma; Caltha alpina; Engel Trank; Wolfsbane

**Description:** Perennial, hardy to Zone 4 or 5. Grows 1-2 feet in height. The leaves form a flat rosette at the base with a spread of 6-12 inches. The leaves are arranged in opposite pairs up the hairy stem. It has a dark cylindrical rhizome. The flowers are vibrant yellow and appear in late spring or early summer. It is native to central Europe though many related species are native to North America.

**Cultivation:** Grows best in a rich, well drained soil. Likes regular moisture during the growing season but can easily be killed by too much water, especially during the dormant winter season. In hot dry areas it must be irrigated every 7-10 days. Prefers full sun. Grows slowly the first year so weed control is critical. No major pest problems. Major disease problem is root rot from too much water. Generally propagated from seed though mature plants can be divided. The seeds are difficult to germinate and must be stratified for 8-12 weeks. Germination is slow and sporadic, 30 days or more and at very low percentages, sometimes less than 30%. Transplant at approximately 3-4 months in late spring from very early seeding. Spacing is 12 inches in the row and 24 inches between rows. Water immediately as it will dry out quickly. Divisions are easily done in spring. The flower is harvested as it starts to mature. Easily picked by hand. It breaks down quickly so if it’s to be sold as fresh it should be kept cool. Leaves are usually harvested at the same time, with the roots harvested in the fall. No significant harvest until year 3. Flowers harvested for dying should be kept shaded until they are put into the dryer. Drying time is 5-7
days. On the United Plant Savers secondary list.

**Constituents:** Contains Sesquiterpene lactones, including the pseudoguanolides arnifolin, the arnicolides, helenalin, and the recently isolated 6-O-isobutyryl-tetrahydrohelenalin and 2-[[beta]-ethoxy-6-O-isobutyryl-2, 3-dihydrohelenalin. Flavonoids such as eupafolin, patuletin, spinacetin and the less common aciniatin, and methylated flavonoids including betuletol and hispidulin. Volatile oil, containing thymol and various ethers of thymol. Mucilage and polysaccharides. Misc. substances such as resins, bitters (arnicin), tannins, carotenes etc.

**Actions:** Anti-inflammatory, vulnerary.

**Characteristics:** a bit sweet & bitter & pungent; warmth: neutral with a secondary cooling effect; moisture: neutral

**History:** Used extensively in European folk medicine. The German philosopher and poet Goethe drank arnica tea to ease his angina in old age. Peasants would set arnica plants around their fields to protect them from the grainwolf, a demon in the form of a horned devil with goat feet that stalked the farms. The word arnica comes from the Greek *arnakis*, meaning lamb’s coat, and refers to the felt-like sepals covered in soft hairs that surround the flower. Leaves and roots are smoked in herbal tobaccos.

**Medicinal Uses:** Used externally, Arnica promotes the healing of wounds contracted through blows, punctures, falls and cuts. It is anti-inflammatory and antiseptic, relieves pain from injuries and promotes tissue regeneration. One can clean wounds, abscesses, boils and ulcers with diluted Arnica tinctures and dress them with a compress soaked in the same solution. For contusions, sprains, bruises, bursitis, arthritis and inflammation of the lymphatic vessels, apply packs of diluted Arnica tincture. To relieve headaches and visual disturbances due to concussion, apply such compresses around the head and neck. To prepare packs and washes, dilute one tablespoon of Arnica tincture in a cup of boiled water (or where sensitivity is suspected, double the water). The tincture made from the flowers is only used externally, whereas the tincture made from the roots is used internally for cases of hematoma and inflammation of the veins. Arnica also improves the circulation. Arnica flowers are sometimes adulterated with other composite flowers, especially *Calendula officinalis*, *Inula brittanica*, *Kragapogon pratensis*, and *Scorzonera humilis*. For tender feet a foot-bath of hot water containing 1/2 oz. of the tincture has brought great relief. Applied to the scalp it will make the hair grow.

Arnica has been shown to be an immuno-stimulant, as both the sesquiterpene lactone helenalin and the polysaccharide fraction stimulate phagocytosis. Sesquiterpene lactones are known to have anti-inflammatory activity and their biological effects appear to be mediated through immunological processes. As helenalin is one of the most active, this might help account for the use of Arnica for pain and inflammation.

Arnica has been used for heart problems (as it contains a cardiotonic substance), to improve circulation, to reduce cholesterol and to stimulate the central nervous system. But the internal use should only be done under supervision. It displays astonishing stimulating, decongesting and relaxing properties. The heart is both stimulated in deficient conditions and relieved in excess ones, depending on the case presented.

For sprains and strains, arnica promotes healing and has an antibacterial action; causes reabsorption of internal bleeding in bruises and sprains. Apply as a cream to the affected area, or soak a pad in diluted tincture and use as a compress. Take homeopathic Arnica 6x every 1-2 hours. Do not use on broken skin; use only homeopathic Arnica internally.

Tincture preparation: Pour 1 pt of 70% alcohol over 2 oz of freshly picked flowers. Seal it tightly in a clear glass container and let it stand
for at least a week in the sun or in a warm place. Filter it and it is ready for use. To store it, put the tincture in a sealed container and keep it out of direct sunlight. For a lotion it may be combined with distilled Witch Hazel.

Oil: Fill a jar halfway with arnica flowers; fill to the top with cold-pressed olive oil or sunflower oil. Close the jar tightly and place it in the sun for 3 weeks. Strain the oil from the flowers into a dark bottle.

Salve: Heat 1 oz of the flowers with 1 oz of cold pressed Arnica oil for a few hours. This is useful for chapped lips and inflamed nostrils, bruises, joint pain, skin rash and acne.

For gingivitis: Mix 1 teaspoon tincture in 1 cup warm water. Rinse the mouth for 10-15 minutes 3-4 times daily or more often. Take small sips. Keep mouthwash in mouth for several minutes, rinsing carefully and thoroughly. Do not swallow.

**Foot Powder**

1 cup white or blue clay  
½ cup dry arnica (whole flowering herb)  
½ cup dry devil’s club (root bark)  
½ cup dry plantain (whole herb)

Grind herbs in coffee mill or herb grinder until a fine powder is produced. Blend well with clay.

**TCM:** Clearing heat in the sense of both deficiency heat and fire toxin is one of its strengths. In Yin deficiency syndromes with either low fever or hot flushes, it matches up well with the likes of hawthorn, rehmannia, mistletoe and valerian.

**Remedy for Chronic Constipation**

½ cup angelica root  
¼ cup arnica root  
1 quart white wine

Mix together ½ cup angelica root and ¼ cup arnica root in 1 quart white wine and allow to soften for a week. Boil and strain. Drink a full whiskey glass of the liquid before eating.

**HOMEOPATHIC USES:** Abscess, apoplexy, pain in back; baldness; bed sores; black eye; boils; bad breath; bronchitis; bruises; corns; cramps; diabetes; dysentery; exhaustion; sore feet; miscarriage; sore nipples; paralysis; rheumatism; sprain; stings; thirst; traumatic fever; tumors whooping-cough; wounds. If you have a scheduled clinical abortion, take arnica homeopathic pills, 30c, two times a day, the day before, the day of, and one to two days following to ease the shock and trauma of the experience. It’s also helpful before and after a C-section or hysterectomy to ease the trauma and shock of surgery. A 3X homeopathic Arnica remedy is used for seasickness, and a 6X preparation for epilepsy.

**FLOWER ESSENCE:** (using Arnica mollis) Arnica helps to heal deep-seated shock or trauma which may become locked into the body and prevent full healing recovery. Especially during accidents or violet experiences, the Higher Self or soul disassociates from its physical vehicle and may never properly re-enter certain parts of the body despite seeming recovery. This remedy can be especially helpful for unlocking many puzzling or psychosomatic illnesses, which do not respond to obvious treatment.

**Aromatherapy Uses:**

**EXTRACTION:** essential oil by steam distillation of flowers and root. The yield of essential oil is very small. An absolute, tincture and resinoid are also produced.

**CHARACTERISTICS:** a yellowy-orange liquid with a greenish-blue hint and a strong bitter-spicy scent reminiscent of radish. Dark yellow or butter-brown oil more viscous than the flower oil, with a strong bitter scent.

**USES:** the tincture is employed mainly in pharmaceutical skin products. The oil from the flowers finds occasional use in herbaceous-type perfumes. It is also used to flavor certain liqueurs.

**Toxicity:** Poisonous. Do not take internally other than in homeopathic dosages without advice of a clinical herbalist. It initially lowers the heartbeat and blood pressure, then raises it and also irritates the digestive tract and kidneys. Large doses may cause dizziness and
tremors. Arnica preparations should not be applied to broken skin. Dermatitis may result from external use. Regulated in the U.S. as an allowable flavoring agent in alcoholic beverages only.

**Cosmetic Uses:**
To firm the breasts after nursing or illness, mix collagen with a teaspoonful of tincture of arnica and massage gently into the breasts using a circular movement. Do daily for a month or so.

Externally a few drops of the extract applied to the scalp and massaged in can promote the growth of hair. Decoctions of flowers and roots are added to footbaths to relieve aches and swelling. The bacteriocidal properties of the powdered herb makes it a good ingredient in foot powders.

**Body Lotion:** To a cupful of witch hazel, add 1 tablespoonful of tincture of arnica and 1 teaspoonful of glycerol. Shake up well and store in a screw-top bottle under refrigeration.

**References:**
The Complete Medicinal Herbal, Penelope Ody, Dorling Kindersley, 1993; ISBN: 1-56458-087-x
The Energetics of Western Herbs, Peter Holmes, Artemis, 1989; ISBN: 0-9623477-6-0

**Sources:**
Crimson Sage, www.crimsonsage.com Plants Richters; www.richters.com seeds, plants, dried flowers

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