**BELLADONNA**

*Atropa belladonna*

[AT-row-puh bel-uh-DON-nuh]

**Family:** Solanaceae

**Names:** Deadly nightshade, devil’s cherries, naughty man’s cherries, divale, black cherry, devil’s herb, great morel, dwayberry, Belladona, Belladone, Belladonne, Beradona, Banewort, Death’s Herb, Dwaleberry, Fair Lady, Great Morel, Naugthy Man’s cherries, Sorceror’s Berry, Witch’s Berry, Dwale, Guzelavratotu, Nwar Boton, Waldnachtschatten, Wolfskers; tollekirsche (Danish); Pokrzyk, wilka jagoda (Polish); Belladone (French); Tollkirsche (German)

**Pharmaceutical name:** Folia Belladonae (leaves)

**Description:** A small bush with a height of 2-3 feet and a width of 2 feet. The flowers are purple-brown, bell-shaped, and drooping about 1 inch long. The leaves are smooth, green in assorted sizes to 5 inches long with prominent veins. The fruit is shiny, smooth, black, jewel-like, and ripen in September. Blooms from June to July. Native to Europe, Asia and northern Africa, but naturalized in other places, mostly in wooded areas.

**Cultivation:** A perennial to Zone 6. Treated as an annual elsewhere. Succeeds in any well-drained moisture retentive soil in sun or partial shade. Prefers a calcareous soil. When grown as a medicinal plant, the highest levels of the medically active alkaloids are obtained from plants growing on a light, permeable chalky soil, especially when on a south-west facing slope. The highest concentrations are also formed when the plant is growing in a sunny position and in hot summers. This species is widely cultivated, especially in eastern Europe, for the medically active compounds it contains. These are used in the drugs industry to produce a range of medicines. Plants tend to be short-lived. Slugs are very fond of this plant and have been known to completely remove the outer bark from the stems. Propagate by seed sown as soon as it is ripe in a cold frame. Germination of stored seed is slow and erratic, usually taking 1 - 6 months at 42°F. When they are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and grow them on in the greenhouse for at least their first winter. Plant them out into their permanent positions in late spring or early summer, after the last expected frosts spacing them apart 18-20 inches. Cuttings of softwood terminal shoots in spring. Plants grown in sunny and dry seasons have the highest percentage of alkaloid. The longitudinally split roots and herbage were dried as quickly as possible at 82-92°F. The roots are odorless, the fresh herbage has faint narcotic smell, but when dried is also odorless. The roots taste sweet at first, but later sharp and bitter like the herbage.

**Constituents:** Tropane alkaloids (hyoscymaine, atropine, scopolamine),
flavonoids, coumarins, volatile bases (nicotine). When the plant is dried, the hyoscyamine is partly converted to atropine by enzyme action, thus producing a greater variety of active substances than in the fresh plant.

**Properties:** smooth muscle antispasmodic, narcotic, reduces sweating, sedative, diuretic

**Energetics:** bitter, warm, toxic

**Meridians/Organs affected:** liver

**History:** Venetian beauties used an eyewash of belladonna leaf to dilate their pupils and make them more attractive, and the herb came to be known as *herba bella donna*, or “herb of the beautiful lady.” A potent plant used for more than vanity, it poisoned Marcus Antonius’s troops during the Parthian wars and was Juliet’s sleeping potion in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. It later earned the name deadly nightshade because it belongs to the nightshade family. *Solanum* comes from *solar* (I ease) and describes a practice of 16th century herbalists who laid moistened leaves on the head to induce sleep. In the late 19th century, a liniment of the root relieved the pain of sciatica, rheumatism, gout and nerve problems. Deadly nightshade was believed to help witches to fly. The generic name *Atropa* came from one of the Greek Fates, Atropos.

According to legends, the plant belongs to the devil who goes about trimming and tending it in his leisure, and can only be diverted from its care on one night in the year, that is on Walpurgis, when he’s preparing for the witches’ Sabbath.

Before the advent of modern anesthetics, belladonna was applied to the skin as “sorcerer’s pomade” to make the patient unconscious before surgery. *Language of Flowers*: silence, hush!

**Medicinal Uses:** A belladonna derivative, atropine is used to dilate eyes prior to eye operations and for some eye exams. It has been official in the *U.S. Pharmacopoeia* since 1820. The tropane alkaloids inhibit the parasympathetic nervous system, which controls involuntary body activities. This reduces saliva; gastric, intestinal and bronchial secretions as well as the activity of the urinary tubules, bladder, and intestines. It is the tropane alkaloids that increase the heart rate and dilate the pupils. It is prescribed to relax distended organs, especially the stomach and intestines, relieving intestinal colic and pain. It helps peptic ulcers and it relaxes spasms of the urinary tubules. The herb can also be used to treat the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease, reducing tremors and rigidity, and improving speech and mobility. The smooth muscle relaxant properties of deadly nightshade make it useful in conventional medicine as an anesthetic, particularly when digestive or bronchial secretions need to be kept to a minimum.

Ivan Raeff, a lay practitioner in Schipka, a village in Bulgaria, discovered that a total extract of belladonna root was successful in treating encephalitis. And the whole extract was better tolerated than the pure alkaloid atropine. A proprietary preparation resulting from this research is Tremoforat.

Belladonna leaves applied externally are used as a treatment and possible cure for cancer by both Western herbalists and in Chinese folk medicine. *Remedies:* tincture, made from the leaves or the root is prescribed by practitioners to relieve colic and to treat Parkinson’s disease. *Dosage:* powdered leaves, 1-2 grains; root, 1-5 grains, alcoholic extract of the leaves 1-3 drops, of the root, -1 drop. *Homeopathy:* Important in homeopathy for sunstroke, painful menstruation and infections or inflammations characterized by sudden onset, redness and violent pain.

**Toxicity:** The therapeutic dose of the plant is very close to the toxic amount. Belladonna increases heartbeat and is too poisonous for common use. On the average, only 4 berries can produce poisonous effects in adults. The berries can be dangerously attractive to children. Cats and dogs are sometimes
poisoned by them, although other animals eat them without harm.

**Ritual Uses:** Gender: Feminine. Herb of Saturn. Element: Water. Deities: Hecate, Bellona, Circe. During the Burning Times, this plant became associated with the devil. Some believe the plant to be named for Bellona, the sister of the Roman god of war, Mars. It has been said that Bellona’s priests drank the juice of the herbe in her honor. Due to being associated with the Fate Atropos, belladonna may be used in rituals for the dead. Added to the chalice of water which will aspurge the Circle, it may be used to help the spirit let go of its longing for the life just ended, helping the beloved to move forward into union with the Universe toward rebirth. This herb is also corresponded with the Death card in tarot as it can be used to help cut the old away, allowing you to enter a new stage in life.

Burning some belladonna (do not inhale the smoke) as an offering to Bellona would be appropriate when preparing to do battle, such as when one must work through negotiations, enter a courtroom, or otherwise engage in competition which is not a sport. Belladonna may be used to invoke Circe and is considered the appropriate herb when consecrating ritual items which contain the metal lead. There is an affinity with onyx as well as they share similar legends and energies. To keep your belladonna empowered for ritual, store an onyx in the container.

**References:**
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**Sources:**
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