PLANTAIN, RIBWORT

Pharmaceutical Name: Herba Plantaginis lanceolatae

Description: The perennial ribwort plantain has a short taproot set with many fibrous roots. The lanceolate leaves, up to 12 inches long, form a basal rosette. The five-grooved leaflets stem of the spiked inflorescence is a constant feature, while the leaves and inflorescence vary enormously in form and size. Each individual flower on the compact globular or short cylindrical flower spike stands in a small dry-skinned subtending leaf. The lowest flowers of each spike bloom first, the styles project and become capable of fertilization. The four white to brownish petals are joined into a tube from which four stamens hang out wide apart during flowering. The fruits each containing two small seeds are tiny lid capsules.

Cultivation: Succeeds in any moderately fertile soil in a sunny position. Plants also succeed in very poor land. An important food plant for the caterpillars of many species of butterflies. Propagate seed by sowing in the spring in a cold frame. When they are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and plant them out in early summer. A sowing can be made outdoors in situ in mid to late spring if you have enough seeds. Harvested material must be dried quickly at 82-92°F to prevent hydrolysis of the aucubin by an enzyme which is contained in the plant. Blackish-brown discolored herbage is of no use. The drug is odorless and has a harsh, slightly salty and bitter taste.

History: Ribwort is an old healing plant which was described in detail by Dioscorides. It has been used both internally and externally. Species of plantain were described by

Much of the information for Greater Plantain (Plantago major) is related.

Plantago lanceolata  
[plan-TA-go lan-see-oh-LAY-tuh]

Family: Plantaginaceae

Names: Adhan As Sakhlah, Buckhorn Plantain, Dar Yaprakli Sinirliot, English Plantain, Gechi Qulaghi, Lance-Leaved Plantain, Llanten Menor, Narrowleaf Plantain, Plantain, Lance-Leaved, Rib Grass, Ribgrass, Ribwort, Ribwort Plantain, Ripple Grass, Small Weegbree, Udhainat As Sakhalah, Zibad
Hieronymus Bock as the most useful of all herbs and used for many complaints. The Latin name *plantago* was derived from the word *planta* meaning “sole of the foot, alluding to the resemblance between the shape of the leaves and that part of the body. Another version is that plantain is the Old French version of the Latin *plantago* meaning “plant.” In medieval days, it was often called *quinquenervia* or “ribs” and today plantain is still called ribwort to describe its definite leaf veins.

**Constituents:** Contains the glycoside aucubin; also contains tannin, mucilage, silicic acid and vitamin C, chlorogenic and ursolic acid and potassium

**Properties:** Antibacterial; Antidote; Astringent; Demulcent; Expectorant; Haemostatic; Laxative; Ophthalmic; Poultice

**Medicinal Uses:** The drug has anti-bacterial characteristics. These are attributed to the aglykon of the aucubin, aucubigenin, which is released by the beta-glucosidasen contained in the plant. Aucubin and the black-brown polymerisates of the aucubigenin are ineffectual. The drug has an enveloping and expectorant effect for infections of the upper respiratory tracts and the urinary system and is prescribed for stomach and intestinal diseases because of its tannin content. As it also has a coagulating effect it was used for the treatment of wounds. The root is a remedy for the bite of rattlesnakes, it is used in equal portions with horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*). The seeds are used in the treatment of parasitic worms. Plantain seeds contain up to 30% mucilage which swells up in the gut, acting as a bulk laxative and soothing irritated membranes. Sometimes the seed husks are used without the seeds. A distilled water made from the plant makes an excellent eye lotion.

**Remedies:**

*Earth Chamber Syrup*

Sterilize a quart mason jar with boiling water. Pack it tightly—about 3/8 inch thick—with a layer of fresh but dry leaves of Ribwort Plantain. Pour in enough liquid honey to cover the layer completely. Press another layer of leaves on top and again cover it with honey. Repeat the procedure until the jar is full. Let the jar stand for several hours or overnight until things settle—and then top it off with more honey. Be sure the leaves are covered. Cover the jar with several layers of thick parchment paper and wrap the neck tightly with wire. Place the jar in a hole in the ground that is about 20 inches deep. Over it put a small board and then cover it carefully with dirt. Be sure to mark the spot. The jar is now surrounded by an even ground temperature that produces a slow fermentation. After 3 months, dig up the jar, press the syrup from the leaves, and pour it into bottles. Store them tightly lidded in a cool place. The slow fermentation process preserves the syrup. Excellent for children over the age of 2.

**Other Uses:** A good fiber is obtained from the leaves, it is said to be suitable for textiles. A mucilage from the seed coats is used as a fabric stiffener. It is obtained by macerating the seed in hot water. Gold and brown dyes are obtained from the whole plant.

**Culinary Uses:** Young leaves are eaten raw or cooked. They are rather bitter and very tedious to prepare, the fibrous strands are best removed prior to eating. The very young leaves are somewhat better and are less fibrous. The seed is cooked. Used like sago. The seed can be ground into a powder and added to flours when making bread, cakes or whatever.

**Recipes:**

*Ribwort Plantain Soup*

4 Tbsp butte
½ cup flour
2 cups milk
2 cups vegetable broth
sea salt and nutmeg to taste
1 cup minced ribwort plantain
1 Tbsp minced parsley
juice of half a lemon

In a saucepan, slowly melt the butter, whisk in the flour, and stir until it bubbles. (Do not let it brown or burn.) Stirring constantly, carefully add the milk and vegetable broth; whisk in the spices. Add the plantain and parsley and simmer the mixture over low heat until the plantain is soft and the soup thickens. Remove the soup from the heat, stir in the lemon juice, and serve with a crusty loaf.
of fresh bread or toasted croutons. (Medicine of the Earth)

References:

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