**BORAGA**

*Borago officinalis*
[bor-AH-go oh-fiss-ih-NAH-liss]

**Family:** Boraginaceae

**Names:** beebread, common bugloss, borage, bourrage, burrage, burridge, cool-tankard, langdebeef, ox-tongue, tailwort, talewort, starflower, bee plant, burage, cool-tankard; Borretsch, Gurkenkraut, Boretsch (German); bourrache, borratze, bouracha, courage, fausse bourrache, langue de boeuf, langue d’oie, (French); borragine, borrana, buglossa vera, vorraccio (Italian); boraga, borraja, becoquino (Spanish); harilik kurgirohi (Estonian); purasruoho (Finnish); Borrach, Borraist, Borraigh (Gaelic); Borrágôfű, Borágó, Borvidág (Hungarian); Ogorecznik lekarski (Polish); Gurkört (Swedish); prikneus, bernagie (Dutch); borragem (Portuguese); Bourándza (Greek)

**Description:** Prickly, bush herb with a height of 2 feet and width of 2½ feet. Flowers are star-shaped, blue, about 1 inch wide, with hairy backs, growing in great profusion. The leaves are prickly, wrinkled, elongated oval, coming to a point. The fruit are relatively large black seeds. Blooms from May to September.

**Cultivation:** Annual that self seeds, occasionally biennial. Germination is 7-10 days. Needs darkness to germinate. Soil temperature 60-70F. Soil is best if dry and poor with a pH of 5-8. Full sun or light shade. The taproot makes it difficult to transplant fully grown plants. It can survive a light frost. Sow to a depth of about ½ inch, in clusters of two to three seeds at 12-24 inch intervals. As the seedlings grow fertilize them. Harvest borage as soon as possible, beginning eight weeks from sprouting, as the tender young leaves of this are the most desirable for culinary use. Mature leaves can be used to flavor iced tea. Borage wilts quickly on harvest and should be used promptly. It does not dry effectively. Seeds of borage grown for seed oil are difficult to collect because the plants shatter their seeds very readily and ripen seeds continuously over a long period.

**History:** The name of the genus is derived from the Arabic *abu araq*, father of sweat, with reference to the plant’s diaphoretic properties. The name borage is often said to come from the Latin *cor* (heart) and *ago* (I stimulate), but in reality it is probably derived from the Latin *borra*, meaning “hair of the beast” and refers to its bristly leaves. An ancient saying, *Ego*
**Borage gaudia semper ago**, meaning, “I, borage, always bring courage,” perpetuated the idea that borage dispelled gloom and brightened spirits. The 1st century Roman Pliny claimed that borage steeped in wine was the famous Nepenthe of Homer, which brought absolute forgiveness when drunk. Young girls would serve borage tea to uncommitted and unwitting young men in the hopes of securing marriage proposals. The candied flowers were given to persons recovering from long illnesses and those prone to swooning.

In the Middle Ages ladies would often embroider borage flowers on the scarves they gave to knights about to fight in tournaments or going off to the Crusades. It’s been favored by botanical illustrators over the centuries and included for its beauty in the garden at Versailles during the reign of Louis XIV.

**Nutritional profile:** one-half cup raw borage contains 9 calories. It provides 0.8 g protein, 0.3 g fat, 1.35 g carbohydrates, 41 mg calcium, 1/45 mg iron, 23 mg magnesium, 1,848 IU vitamin A and 15.4 mg vitamin C.

**Constituents:** Leaves/Flowers: saponins, mucilage, tannins, essential oil, mineral acids (potassium, calcium); alkaloids (pyrrolizidine, 2-10 ppm). Seeds: essential fatty acids including gamma-linolenic acids

**Properties:** diaphoretic, expectorant, tonic, anti-inflammatory, galactogogue, diuretic, emollient

**Character:** cold, moist, slightly sweet

**Meridians/Organs affected:** lungs, heart

**Ritual Use:** Gender: Masculine. Planet: Jupiter. Element: Air. Powers: Courage, Psychic Powers. It is thought to improve courage, sharpen one’s wit, and hinder sadness. It is one of the best herbs to use when making a magickal tonic. Carry the fresh blossoms to strengthen your courage, or place one in your buttonhole for protection when walking outdoors. A tea of borage induces psychic powers. Herbe of Leo.

**Spells:**

**Cup of Courage:** Use this potion during situations that require you to be brave. Squeeze the juice from an orange and mix it with one-quarter cup of sugar. Add one-quarter cup of dried borage and stir thoroughly. Allow this to steep overnight. Strain the borage from the liquid and discard it. Add this liquid to 16 fluid ounces of red wine and serve it over ice. Garnish with fruit slices. Enhance the power by adding a few drops of borage flower remedy.

**Medicinal Uses:** Poultices from the leaves are used to cool and soothe inflammations. In Latin America, a borage tea is drunk for lung problems. With its high mucilage content, borage is a demulcent and soothes respiratory problems. Its emollient qualities make it helpful for sore and inflamed skin—prepared either as freshly squeezed juice, in a poultice, or as an infusion. The flowers encourage sweating, and the leaves are diuretic. The seed oil is particularly rich in polyunsaturated fats and is superior in this respect to evening primrose oil. Borage seed oil is used to treat premenstrual complaints, rheumatic problems, eczema, and other chronic skin conditions. Gamma linoleic acid (GLA) which is found in borage seed oil (also evening primrose and black currant oils) is used to reduce inflammation, boost immunity and help maintain cell membranes in painful inflammatory disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis. Research has also shown that GLA supplements can help recovering alcoholics stay sober and slow down the damage that alcohol is known to cause to brain and liver cells. To help with Raynaud massage the oil into the fingers. For bronchitis and fevers, boil 10 grams of flowers and young leaves in a liter of water, and drink the tea.

**APPLICATIONS:**

Leaves:
Infusion—take in the early stages of lung disorders or feverish colds. Lactating mothers may combine it with fennel to stimulate milk

Tincture—take 10 ml, three times a day, as a tonic following steroid therapy and for stress

Juice—Pulp fresh leaves and drink 10 ml of the juice, three times a day, for depression, grief, or anxiety

Lotion—Dilute the juice with an equal volume of water, and use for irritated, dry skin or nervous rashes

Seeds:

Capsules—Take 500 mg oil in capsule form daily as a supplement for eczema or rheumatoid arthritis. The oil is also helpful in some cases of menstrual irregularity, for irritable bowel syndrome, or as emergency first aid for hangovers (take 1 g)

Flowers:

Syrup—Take a syrup made from the infusion as an expectorant for coughs. Can be combined with mullein or marshmallow flowers.

Flower Essences: Borage is an excellent heart remedy, especially for the feeling of heaviness in the heart and perhaps throughout the body. Borage flower essence helps the heart to experience this ebullience and lightness, filling the soul with fresh forces of optimism and enthusiasm. It is an excellent all-purpose balm and toner in many formulas when the soul needs upliftment and encouragement. For heavy-heartedness, lack of confidence in facing difficult circumstances.

Toxicity: the bristles on borage stems are irritating. Handling the plant may cause contact dermatitis in sensitive people. Because it is high in calcium, borage may be prohibited for people who form calcium oxalate kidney stones. While some scientists question the advisability of sitting down to a plate of borage leaves because of their pyrrolizidine alkaloids, eating a few flowers and young leaves can hardly be considered risky.

Cosmetic Use:

Borage Face Pack: Add an egg yolk and 1 tsp of almond oil to a borage infusion (1 Tbsp of finely chopped borage leaves to a cup of boiling water, allowing to stand for 5-10 minutes before straining). Add to a paste with ¼ oz fresh yeast or 1 tsp dried and a little water, and apply the mixture evenly to a clean dried skin. Leave for at least 10 minutes before rinsing off with cool water. Pat carefully with a soft towel.

Culinary Use: To prepare the flowers, gently pull each blossom by its calyx to release it from its hairy black center. Gently rinse and pat dry. Keep flowers in the refrigerator between damp paper towels if not using them right away. Both flowers and leaves have a cumberry flavor. The flowers are a sturdy garnish for dips, salads and beverages. Traditionally, borage flowers have been most often used to adorn wine cups and teas. Float them in punch bowls or use them to garnish a simple glass of iced tea or lemonade. They are pretty frozen in ice cubes, and perfect for candying. Top cold soups with a dab of sour cream and a borage flower. Tuck in a few blossoms into fresh peas. Boil potatoes, roll in butter and sprinkle with finely chopped borage leaves and a few flowers. They look dramatic with cottage cheese and you can add a few to a platter of corned beef and cabbage. The mature leaves are a bit hairy for most tastes so use the young ones. Do not tear or cut borage leaves until you are actually ready to use them. When you cut into a food rich in vitamin C, its cells release an enzyme called ascorbic acid oxidase. This chemical destroys vitamin C and reduces the nutritional value of the food. To prevent a reaction between the tannins in the borage and metal, cook your borage in a glass, enamaled or stainless steel pot. Dried borage leaves are less flavorful than fresh ones. They are also lower in vitamin C.

Borage flowers were once used to flavor claret and ciders.

Recipes:

Pansy and Borage Bounty
1 handful each, pansy and borage flowers
4 cups water, warm
juice of 1 lemon
sugar to taste
   Leave the pansy and borage flowers in warm water for 12 hours to infuse. Strain, adding lemon juice and sugar. Garnish with a slice of lemon or fresh, cheerful petals. (A Witch’s Brew)

Borage and Cucumbers in Sour Cream Dressing
3 medium cucumbers
1 cup sour cream or plain yogurt
2 Tbsp rice vinegar
½ tsp celery seed
¼ cup scallions, chopped
1 tsp granulated sugar
salt and freshly ground pepper
¼ cup very young borage leaves, finely chopped
borage flowers for garnish
   Wash, score and slice the cucumbers very thin. Salt lightly and let stand in a colander for 30 minutes to drain. Rinse off the salt and pat dry. In a bowl, mix remaining ingredients, adding salt and pepper to taste. Add cucumbers and toss lightly. Refrigerate for 1 hour before serving. Garnish with borage flowers. (Edible Flowers from Garden to Palate)

Blender Borage Soup
2 cups chicken broth
1 cup buttermilk
1½ Tbsp chopped onion
1½ Tbsp lemon juice
salt and pepper
6 borage leaves
2 cucumbers
1 cup sour cream
6 borage flowers
   Put the broth and buttermilk into a blender with the onion, lemon juice, salt and pepper, borage leaves and cucumbers (peeled, seeded, and quartered), and blend well. Add the sour cream and blend again. Chill well. In serving garnish each individual bowl with a blue borage flower. (The Forgotten Art of Flower Cookery)

Charles Dickens Punch
2 cups water
½ cup sugar
2 Tbsp lemon peel
¼ cup borage flowers
2 cups sherry
1 cup brandy
4 cups apple cider
   Pour boiling water over the sugar, lemon peel, and borage, and let sit 10 minutes. Strain and add sherry, brandy and cider. (The Illustrated Herb Encyclopedia)

Summer Claret Cup
1 Tbsp superfine sugar
3 cups fresh strawberries
4 small strips cucumber peel
juice of 3 lemons
3 Tbsp brandy
2 Tbsp Cointreau
2 bottles claret or similar red wine
1 bottle sparkling mineral water, soda or lemonade
borage flowers and sprigs of mint, to decorate
   Dissolve the sugar in a little hot water and place in a large bowl. Slice the strawberries if they are large and add to the bowl with the cucumber strips, lemon juice, brandy and Cointreau. Pour in the 2 bottles of wine and top up with mineral water, soda or lemonade, as desired. When ready to serve, add ice and a liberal sprinkling of borage flowers and mint sprigs. (Betty Crocker’s Book of Flowers)

Pasta Salad
Salad:
2 cups tricolor pasta (rotini or macaroni), cooked al dente
1 cup sugar snap peas, stringed and cut in thirds
1 cup sweet red pepper, cut in thin slices
4 scallions, coarsely chopped
¼ cup plus 3 Tbsp borage flowers

Dressing:
3 Tbsp safflower oil
2 tsp rose vinegar
1 Tbsp grated ginger
1 clove of garlic, crushed
1 Tbsp tamari
Whisk all ingredients together.
Toss salad ingredients (reserving 3 Tbsp borage flowers) together with dressing. Allow to stand at room temperature for several hours. Just before serving, garnish with remaining borage flowers. (Edible Flowers from Garden to Palate)

Poached Salmon with Yogurt-Borage Raita
1 8 oz container plain yogurt
2 Tbsp mayonnaise
1 medium cucumber peeled, seeded, and very finely diced
10 fresh mint leaves, finely chopped
1 tsp curry powder
salt to taste
1 Tbsp lemon juice
½ cup borage flowers

For the salmon
1 cup white wine
1 bay leaf
2 scallions, whole
1 cup water
½ bunch parsley, tied with string
4 8-oz salmon steaks, trimmed and tied in cheesecloth

To make the raita, in a medium bowl mix yogurt, mayonnaise, cucumber, mint, curry powder, salt and lemon juice. Stir in flowers just before serving. Reserve a few flowers for garnish. Raita can be made up to 8 hours ahead. It will keep 2-3 days in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

To poach the salmon, in a large saucenpan, combine the wine, bay leaf, scallions, water, and parsley. Bring to a simmer (do not boil). Gently lower salmon steaks wrapped in cheesecloth into simmering liquid. Simmer 10-12 minutes, or until fish turns pink and flaky. With a spatula, transfer the salmon steaks to a serving platter. Drain liquid through a fine-meshed sieve and reserve for another use. This dish can be served hot at room temperature, or chilled. Before serving, top each steak with raita and fresh borage flowers. (Edible Flowers a Kitchen Companion)

Fennel, Radish and Borage Salad with Citrus Vinaigrette
½ lb bulb fennel
½ cup small, young fresh borage leaves, torn into bite-sized pieces
6 oz radishes, thinly sliced
1 Tbsp grapefruit juice
1 tsp white wine vinegar
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp ground black pepper
2 Tbsp walnut oil
1 Tbsp canola oil

To prepare the fennel, first cut the top off the fennel and remove any discolored outer portions; then slice the bulb I half from top to bottom, cut out the core, and finally cut thin slices, starting at the bottom. Toss the borage, radishes, and fennel together in a large serving bowl. Toss the borage, radishes, and fennel together in a large serving bowl. In a small bowl, combine the grapefruit juice, vinegar, salt and pepper. Whisk in the walnut and canola oils, adding them in a thin stream. Toss and serve. (The Herbal Palate)

Freedom Rice
1½ cups rice
3 cups water
2 tsp fresh borage leaf
1 red pepper, sliced
1 Tbsp oil
fresh borage flowers

Combine the rice, water, and borage leaf in a medium-sized saucepan. Bring to a boil. Cover; simmer until the rice is done, about 20 minutes. Lightly saute’ the red pepper in the oil. Top the rice with slices of pepper. Garnish with borage flowers. (A Kitchen Witch’s Cookbook)

Scallops with Vegetables, Thyme, Borage and Opal Basil
¼ cup butter, softened
2 Tbsp fresh thyme leaves or 1½ Tbsp dried thyme
¼ tsp black pepper, divided
2 leeks, white part only, cut into julienne strips
1¼ inches long
2 carrots, cut into julienne strips 1 1/2 inches long
1 lb bay scallops
1 large fresh borage leaf cut into julienne strips
3 Tbsp finely chopped fresh opal basil or green basil
juice of 1 lemon

Mash butter, thyme, and 1/8 teaspoon of the pepper together in a small bowl until well blended. Set aside. Pour boiling water over leeks and carrots, and let steep for 3 minutes. Drain, and set aside. Cut 4 12-inch squares of aluminum foil, and distribute equal amounts of leek and carrot strips in the center of each square, reserving a few leek and carrot strips for the top layer. Place equal portions of scallops over vegetables. Sprinkle borage and basil over scallops. Add the remainder of the pepper and the lemon juice over each. Place a few reserved strips of leeks and carrots over each portion of scallops, and spoon 1 Tbsp of the thyme butter in the center.

Lift 2 opposite edges of the foil so that they meet in the center, and make an airtight seam along the length of the foil by folding it over a few times. Then fold in the remaining edges several times to form a loose package and to create a seal. Leave some space inside to allow for expansion. These packets can now either be refrigerated until cooking time or cooked at once in a preheated 450°F oven. Place on a baking sheet and bake for 12-15 minutes. Serve packets alongside cooked angel’s hair pasta or cooked rice, and let your guests open them right at the table. (The Herb & Spice Cookbook—A Seasoning Celebration)

**Borage-Yogurt Dip**
3 cup plain yogurt
1 clove garlic minced
3 Tbsp chopped borage
1 Tbsp chopped salad burnet
1 Tbsp chopped basil

Make a yogurt cheese: Line a sieve with a double thickness of cheesecloth, set over a bowl. Place yogurt in sieve and put sieve and bowl in refrigerator for at least 3 hours or overnight. Mix yogurt cheese with remaining ingredients in medium bowl. Refrigerate until ready to use. (Recipes from Riversong)

**Floral Tostadas**
10 flour tortillas, deep fried
4 cups pinto beans, cooked and mashed
½ cup nasturtium leaves, chopped
1 cup tomatoes, chopped
2 avocados, sliced
½ cup black olives, pitted and chopped
1 cup carrots, grated
2 cups cheddar cheese, grated
½ cup hot sauce
1 cup borage flowers
1 cup nasturtium petals

Assemble ingredients on tortillas in layers, starting with the mashed beans and ending with the flowers. Add hot sauce to taste. (Edible Flowers from Garden to Palate)

**Borage Ravioli**
Filling:
2 lbs young borage leaves, cleaned
2 shallots, minced
1 garlic clove, minced
4 oz good cheese, crumbled
4 oz Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
1 egg
salt and nutmeg to taste

Pasta:
3 cups flour
6 egg yolks
1 egg
2 Tbsp olive oil
dash of salt

Blanch the borage leaves in boiling water, then quickly cool in ice water. Remove from water and drain, squeezing excess water out of the borage. Finely chop borage leaves and combine with shallots, garlic, cheeses and egg. Mix well. Add salt and a touch of nutmeg to taste. Combine all the pasta ingredients in a food processor. Pulse until dough becomes smooth and starts to form a ball. Turn out dough on a pastry board and knead for 10 minutes. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and let rest in the refrigerator for 30 minutes. Divide the dough into two long strips of equal size. Roll out the first chunk of dough until
you can read a newspaper headline through it. Evenly place small 1- to 2 oz mounds of the filling, about 1 inch apart, over the dough.

Roll out remaining dough to the same shape and thickness as the first. Gently place the second sheet of dough over the first. With the flat side of the thumb, press the two sheets of dough together between the filling mounds. Cut individual ravioli using a fluted pastry wheel. Bring salted water to a boil in a large pot. Place ravioli in boiling water and cook for 5-7 minutes or until the inside is thoroughly cooked. Strain cooked ravioli and toss with butter and fresh thyme or a fresh tomato-basil sauce. (The Herb Companion Aug/Sept 2003)

References:


Sources:
Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com

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