

## BURDOCK



### *Arctium lappa*

[ARK-tee-um LAP-uh]

**Family:** Asteraceae

**Names:** Beggar's Buttons, Clotburr, Bardana, Happy Major, Hardock, Burrseed, Personata, Great Burdock, Hurrburr, Hare-burr, Cocklebur, Sticktight, Personata, Love Leaves, Cockle Buttons, Fox's Clote, lappa, lappa minor, thorny burr, clothburr, gobo (Japanese), Bardane (French), Klette (German), Lappola or Bardana (Italian), Bardana (Spanish); Lopan (Polish); Niu bang zi (Chinese)

**Description:** A large herb, with tall stalk and huge leaves. Height to 10 feet and width to 3 feet. Flowers are round heads of purple on 3 to 4 foot stalks. Leaves are wavy, dull green on top, with fine, gray, downy undersides, to 20 inches long. Supported on stout stems that rise from a central location. Fruit is a sphere of brown-gray burrs. The taproot is up to 3 feet long. Blooms from mid-July to September.

**Cultivation:** Biennial. Zone 3. Germination in 6-10 days. Space 2-3 feet apart. Ideal soil temperature 70F. Soil, dry, medium rich, well drained, with pH of 5-8. Full sun. Sow seeds

directly into the garden. Many herbalists mix wood chips and sawdust into burdock beds to keep the soil loose so roots are easier to harvest. Harvest the roots during the fall of the first year or the spring of the second.

**History:** Scientific name is from the Greek words for *arktos*, meaning "bear", and *lappa*, meaning "to seize". The English "bur" came from the French word for "woolly" - "bouurre", and the word "dock" is from Old English, referring to large leaves. The leaves of Burdock closely resemble those of broad-leaved dock and it was originally called "burdock", a kind of "dock with burrs". Broad-leaved dock and burdock were used by farm women who wrapped their butter in the large cool leaves to keep it from melting on the way to market, so Burdock may be a corruption of "Beurre [butter] dock". Velcro was developed by George de Mestral of Switzerland after observing the burdock seed's hundreds of tiny hooks through his magnifying glass. It is mentioned in three of Shakespeare's plays: *Troilus and Cressida*, *King Lear*, and *As You Like It*. The large heart-shaped leaves were once used as masks in ancient Greek drama to cover the faces of actors when they performed, which is where the name *Personata* may have come from.

Burdock is an herb of Venus and useful in love matters. An old charm directed a girl to pick a bur and name it for her lover. She then threw it against her skirt or had a friend do so. If it stuck, he was true; if it did not, he was faithless. The stems when peeled and eaten "increased seed and provoked bodily lust." Yet another claim stated that the root, eaten with fat meat, cured lust.

**Properties:** mucilaginous, alterative, diuretic, diaphoretic (fresh), urinary tonic, demulcent, bitter, laxative, vulnerary

**Energetics:** Root/leaves are cool, drying, bitter; root is slightly sweet; seeds are cold, pungent, bitter.

**Meridians/Organs affected:** lungs, stomach, liver, kidneys

**Constituents:** Inulin, essential oil, resin, antibiotic substance, polyacetylenes, organic acids, seeds contain fixed oils, glycoside, chorogenic acid. Leaves contain arctiol, fukinone, taraxasterol.

**Medicinal Uses:** Western herbalists have long used burdock for its demulcent action, both externally and internally, and for its alterative effects on the blood and urinary system. During the Middle Ages, remedies for kidney stones contained burdock in the belief that a stony character in a medicine would cure the stony ailment.

The Chinese find it more valuable as a healer of hot (yang) conditions. It enters the liver meridian and benefits spleen deficiency. Its diaphoretic and diuretic properties make it valuable for eliminating excess nervous energy, sweating out toxins, and cooling the heat of infections. They also use it for colds, flus, measles, and constipation. The Chinese also consider burdock to be a strengthening aphrodisiac.

The most popular western use of burdock root is as a primary herb in blood purifier formulas. It is also used to cleanse the body of uric acid and other residues that accumulate from rheumatism, arthritis, and gout. Seeds are sometimes used for skin problems. The shredded leaves have also been folded into egg whites and applied as a skin dressing to accelerate healing. Tests confirm that it kills both bacterial and fungal infections. French herbalists have used the fresh root to lower blood sugar levels in diabetics because it contains the easily digestible starch "inulin". It is also believed, but not proven, that the root

regenerates liver cells and stimulates the gallbladder. Burdock is used in many parts of the world in herbal cancer treatments, was an ingredient in the Hoxsey formula, and is one of the four ingredients in the Essiac formula. If you want to try burdock in conjunction with other cancer therapy, a suggested use is to make a decoction by boiling 1 teaspoon of root in 3 cups of water for 30 minutes. Cool. Drink up to 3 cups a day. Has a sweet taste, similar to celery root. Or as a tincture, take ½ to 1 teaspoon up to three times a day.

Its nutritional profile shows it very high in chromium, iron, magnesium, silicon, and thiamine. Carbohydrates predominate in burdock, making up over 70% of the air-dried root. "Inulin" (gives Jerusalem artichokes their sweet flavor) makes up 40-50% of the root, with the remaining carbohydrates being mucilage, various monosaccharides, and starch. The carbohydrates are responsible for the demulcent effects of burdock and add viscous fiber to the diet. One cup boiled and drained burdock root has 110 calories. It provides 2.6 g protein, 0.2 g fat, 26.4 g carbohydrates, 62 mg calcium and .0 mg iron.

#### *APPLICATIONS*

Root decoction is used for skin disorders, especially persistent boils, sores, and dry, scaling eczema; tincture is used in combination with arthritic, digestive herbs, such as yellow dock, to detoxify the system and stimulate the digestion; also for urinary stones and gravel; poultice is applied to skin sores and leg ulcers; a wash of the decoction is used for acne and fungal skin infections, such as athlete's foot and ringworm;

leaf infusion is used for indigestion and as a mild digestive stimulant; poultice is applied to bruises and skin inflammations, including acne; infused oil is used for varicose ulcers; seed decoction is taken for feverish colds with sore throat and cough. Used with heartsease for skin eruptions.

#### *Combinations:*

Skin Problems: yellow dock, red clover or cleavers

## MEDICINAL RECIPES

### *Burdock Beer*

Take a quart each of the fresh roots of Burdock, Wild Sarsaparilla, and Spikenard. Scrub them clean, slice lengthwise, and cut them in half. Boil them in 6 quarts of water, down to 2 quarts, strain, and when cool, add a pint of molasses or a 1/2 pound of sugar, with yeast sufficient to make it work. As soon as the fermentation commences, it may be drunk. Allow fermentation for 3 or 4 days. Continue as a drink until health is restored. Good for cleansing and purifying the blood. (Eat the Weeds)

### *TCM:*

*Indications:* all “wind-heat” ailments; throat infections; pneumonia; inflammations of urinal tract; abscesses.

*Therapeutic Effects:* expels wind-dampness and wind-heat; clears internal heat

*Veterinary Medicine:* Burdock root is a good medicinal remedy for coughing, sickly sheep. To treat them, add freshly chopped root to their feed. For cattle and horses likewise suffering from cough, mix Burdock root, Coltsfoot, Gentian and Oregano in equal parts to the fodder. Lastly mixing the dried leaves into their food strengthens cattle.

**Toxicity:** Burdock contains organic chemicals called *lactones* that can cause contact dermatitis in sensitized people.

### **Cosmetic Uses:**

*Skin Cleanser:* ¼ cup burdock root, ¼ cup dried nettle leaves, ¼ cup dried horsetail. Boil for 15 minutes in 3 cups water. Strain. Add to bath water.

*Hair Rinse for oily hair:* ½ cup burdock root, ¾ Tbsp horsetail leaf; ¾ Tbsp chamomile, ½ cup soapwort, 1 Tbsp nettle. Make a dry mixture of the above ingredients. Throw 1 Tbsp of the herb mixture onto a cup of boiling water and boil for a few minutes. Allow to cool. Strain and use to rinse hair.

**Culinary Uses:** Burdock has been cultivated in the Orient for food and is still considered a staple in Japan, where it is known as “Gobo”. Young roots, about 2 feet long, are collected and finely sliced, then added to stir-fries, soups, and stews, or eaten raw. They can be boiled, buttered, and served like turnips or potatoes. They are also roasted to make “coffee” and can be pounded and added to pancakes or prepared like potatoes. The Russians season fish and game by wrapping them in burdock leaves and cooking the bundle in a pit that has previously been heated with a fire. Flower stalks, cut before the flowers bloom, can be boiled as a vegetable or eaten raw after being sprinkled with oil and vinegar. Very young leaves can be used in salads, and the stems can be candied like angelica.

To keep cooked burdock roots white, prepare them in a glass or enameled pan, never iron or aluminum.

**Ritual Uses:** Gender: Cold. Planet: Venus. Element: Water. Basic Powers: Purification, Protection. Specifics: Cast in house or magic room to ward off negativity. Add to protection sachets of all kinds. Wear a necklace of dried, carved burdock roots as protection against magic.

**Other Uses:** For an organic fertilizer, burn the green herb (between the time of flowering and seeding) in a hole made in the ground, without letting the flames escape. 3 pounds of ashes produces 15 oz of very white alkaline salt.

*Dye:* 1 pot burdock

4 gal water

¼ lb wool premordanted with alum

¼ lb wool premordanted with chrome

¼ lb wool premordanted with tin

¼ lb wool premordanted with copper

Boil the burdock plant. Strain out the plant material and add enough water to make up the 4 gallons. Take the premordanted wools, rinse them in successively warmer water and add them to the dye pot. Stir often, simmering for ½ to ¾ hour. Cool and rinse. Colors: with alum pale yellow; with tin yellow; with copper deep gold with chrome light gold

## Recipes

### Burdock Spread

½ cup burdock root, finely cut  
1/8 cup yellow dock root, finely cut  
1 cup apple cider vinegar  
½ cup sour cream or yogurt

Simmer roots in the vinegar for about 5 minutes. Process in a blender, then add the cream or yogurt. Serve on Potatoes or other vegetable dishes. (*The Illustrated Herb Encyclopedia*)

### Root Beer

5 quarts water  
¼ oz hops  
½ oz dried burdock root  
½ oz dried yellow dock root  
½ oz dried sarsaparilla root  
½ oz dried sassafras root  
½ oz dried spikenard root  
1½ cups sugar  
1/8 tsp granulated yeast

Simmer herbs in water for 30 minutes. Add sugar, stir to dissolve, and strain into a crock. Cool to lukewarm, add yeast, and stir well. Cover crock and leave to ferment for about an hour. Funnel into sterilized bottles and cap tightly. (*The Herb Companion Cooks*)

### Boiled Burdock Stems

Use the young shoots, leaf stems, and flower stalks. Peel to leave only the soft core, and slice into 1/4-inch pieces. Simmer, covered, for 6 to 10 minutes in just enough water to cover the bottom of the pan. Drain well and serve with melted butter and freshly ground black pepper. (*Wild Food*)

### Sauteed Burdock Stems

Remove the leaves of young stems and peel off the thick, bitter rind. Dice the peeled stems and plunge them into boiling water to cover. Boil 8-10 minutes, drain, and add fresh boiling water. Boil for 5 more minutes and drain well. The stems should be tender but crisp. Melt some butter in a pan and add the diced Burdock. Saute about 5 minutes and season with salt and freshly ground pepper. Plain

diced, cooked Burdock can be served in a fine cream sauce or added to homemade vegetable soup. It can also be baked, with or without the cream sauce, in a buttered casserole. Sprinkle bread crumbs and freshly grated Parmesan cheese generously over the top, dot with butter, and bake at 375F until cheese is melted and bread crumbs are browned. (*A City Herbal*)

### Japanese Pork with Burdock Root

¾ lb pork chops with bones  
2 Tbsp Japanese soy sauce  
1 thick Burdock root  
1 Tbsp vinegar,  
1 oz piece fresh ginger root  
salt to taste  
2 eggs, beaten  
chopped scallions (optional)

Cut pork into 1-inch slices. Place bones in 2 cups water with soy sauce, and simmer about 30 or 40 minutes to make pork stock. Discard bones, set stock aside. While stock is cooking, prepare Burdock root. Wash it thoroughly, then peel outer rind with vegetable peeler. Score along length with a sharp knife, then peel off shavings with the peeler. Soak Burdock shavings in two changes of cold water, 20 minutes each time. Then place Burdock in a saucepan and pour boiling water over to cover. Add vinegar and simmer until tender, about 20 minutes. Drain, set aside. Peel ginger root and slice into thin shreds. Bring stock to a boil, and add ginger and pork. Simmer until pork turns white. Add Burdock and bring quickly to a boil. Add salt to taste. When it is heated through, pour beaten eggs over all. When eggs are just set, remove from heat and sprinkle with chopped scallions if desired. (*A City Herbal*)

### Burdock Bloom Spike Bake

4 cups cooked burdock bloom spike rounds  
1 cup Parmesan cheese  
2/3 cup bread crumbs  
1/3 cup mayonnaise  
2 Tbsp vegetable oil  
½ cup finely chopped onion  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
paprika

Collect at least a dozen burdock bloom spikes when they are about 1-2 feet high and still in the process of growing taller (way before the flowers show up.) Cut them as close to the ground as you can and strip off the large leaves and stalks. When you get the bloom spikes home, peel off the outer rind, which tends to be stringy and bitter. Chop the peeled bloom spikes into rounds about 1/3 inch thick. Drop the spikes into an ample supply of boiling salted water and boil until tender (10-15 minutes). Remove and drain. Add all ingredients except the paprika to 4 cups of the boiled burdock bloom spikes and combine. Spread in a pie pan or flat baking dish and sprinkle paprika over the top. Bake at 350F until bubbly (about 20 minute). Serve hot with crackers. Serves 6-8. (An Herbal Feast)

### **Savory Burdock Patties**

1 ½ cups grated burdock root  
2/3 cup bread crumbs  
½ cup sliced, steamed wild or commercial carrots or parsnips  
¼ cup each cooked mushrooms and chopped olives (optional)  
1/3 to ½ cup water or stock (or water you cooked burdock in)  
2 eggs  
½ tsp thyme  
1 small onion, minced  
¼ tsp sea salt  
1/8 tsp black pepper

Steam or simmer the grated burdock root. Let it cool, then mix it with all the other ingredients. Form into small patties and bake them on an oiled cookie sheet at 300F for 10-15 minutes. Turn them over and bake them another 10-15 minutes, or until done. Serve plain, with a sauce, or with relish. Makes 24 patties (Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants in Wild (and Not So Wild) Places)

### **Roasted Burdock**

Roll whole, cleaned burdock roots in fresh, young burdock leaves, then wrap them in aluminum foil. Roast them in hot ashes for 45

to 60 minutes. Serve with soy sauce. (Wild Food)

### **Burdock Boiled Dry**

Cut young burdock roots into long, thin pieces the size of matchsticks. Place them in a heavy saucepan, cover them with water, and add a good dash of soy sauce and a small pinch of salt. Bring to a boil and simmer, covered, for 15 minutes, then remove the lid and continue cooking to allow the juices to evaporate and the soy-sauce flavor to be absorbed by the cooked roots. Make sure that the burdock does not stick. (Wild Food)

### **Ruth's Burdock and Brown Rice Dinner**

1-2 oz hijiki seaweed  
2 Tbsp tamari soy sauce  
1 cup thinly sliced fresh burdock root  
1 cup thinly sliced carrots  
3 Tbsp sesame seeds  
2 pinches thyme  
¼ cup chopped fresh chickweed and/or violet leaves, lamb's quarters, dandelion or parsley  
2 cups cooked brown rice

Pour boiling water over hijiki to cover by ¼ inch; add the tamari and let marinate for 24 hours. In a separate pot, steam thinly sliced burdock root for 5 minutes; then add the carrots. Cook until tender. My favorite wild green for this dish is chickweed. Its moist texture complements the rice and seaweed nicely. Mix hijiki, burdock, carrots, sesame seeds and greens together. Serve on top of freshly cooked rice. Sprinkle with thyme. Serves 4-6. (An Herbal Feast)

### **Burdock Burr Casserole**

2 cups burrs and leaves (collect early spring, before fully formed, and include new young leaves)  
1 tsp thyme  
1 tsp Queen Anne's lace seeds  
1 cup none-fat dry milk  
4 Tbsp butter  
1 cup whole wheat bread crumbs.

Wash burrs and leaves, and place in pot, covering with water. Simmer gently for 5 minutes, drain off water, and add thyme, Queen

Anne's laces seeds, and cover with water, simmering for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, drain off water and save. (soup stock, can and freeze). Add 1 cup non-fat dry milk or water to cover. 4 Tbsp butter or oil, topping with 1 cup bread crumbs. Bake at 350F for 10 minutes. Serves 4

### References:

- A City Herbal, Maida Silverman, Alfred A. Knopf, 1977
- The Complete Book of Herbs, Spices and Condiments, Carol Ann Rinzler, Facts on File, 1990
- The Complete Medicinal Herbal, Penelope Ody, Dorling Kindersley, 1993
- Dyeing the Natural Way, Frances E. Mustard, 1977; ISBN: 0-915498-68-5
- Eat the Weeds, Ben Charles Harris, Barre Publishers, 1972
- Foundations of Health, Christopher Hobbs, Botanica Press, 1992
- The Healing Herbs, Michael Castleman, Rodale Press, 1991
- The Herb Companion Cooks, Interweave Press, 1994
- Herbal Delights, Mrs. C.F. Lyeal, Gramercy Press, 1986 (1938 original)
- An Herbal Feast, Risa Mornis, Keats Publishing, 1998; ISBN: 0-87983-801-9
- Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants in Wild (and Not So Wild) - Places, Steve Brill, Hearts Books, 1994; ISBN: -0-688-11425-3
- The Illustrated Herb Encyclopedia, Kathi Keville, Mallard Press, 1991
- Magical Herbalism, Scott Cunninham, Llewellyn Publishing, 1982
- Medicine of the Earth, Susanne Fischer-Rizzi, Rudra Press, 1996; ISBN: 0-915801-59-0
- Nutritional Herbology, Mark Pedersen, Wendell H. Whitman Co., 1995
- Polish Herbs, Flowers & Folk Medicine, Sophie Hodorowicz Knab, Hippocrene Books, 1995; ISBN: 0-7818-0319-5
- Wild Food, Roger Phillips, Little Brown, 1986

### Resources:

Companion Plants, [www.companionplants.com](http://www.companionplants.com)  
plants  
Crimson Sage,; <http://www.crimson-sage.com>  
Plants, seeds  
The Rosemary House,  
[www.therosemaryhouse.com](http://www.therosemaryhouse.com) tincture

HERBALPEDIA™ is brought to you by The Herb Growing & Marketing Network, PO Box 245, Silver Spring, PA 17575-0245; 717-393-3295; FAX: 717-393-9261; email: herbworld@aol.com URL: <http://www.herbalpedia.com> Editor: Maureen Rogers. Copyright 2007. All rights reserved. Material herein is derived from journals, textbooks, etc. THGMN cannot be held responsible for the validity of the information contained in any reference noted herein, for the misuse of information or any adverse effects by use of any stated material presented.