

EVENING PRIMROSE



Oenothera biennis

[ee-no-THEE-ruh by-EN-iss]

(previously *O. muricata* also *O. clavaeformis*-
Desert Evening Primrose, *O. hookeri*)

Family: Onagraceae

Names: common evening primrose, evening star, wild evening primrose, field evening primrose, tree primrose, fever plant, night willow-herb, king's cure-all, large rampion, scurvish, scabish; canhlo'gan hu'nla [rattle weed] (Lakota); owesa'wanakuk [yellow top] (Potawatomi); Nachtkerze (German); onagre (French); enotera (Italian); Wiesolek dwuletni (Polish); Flor de Santa Rita (Spanish); Flor de San Juan

Description: Identified by its tall and dramatic flowering stalk. The plant can grow to 6 feet with a width of 1½ feet. The flowers are fragrant with 4 yellow petals (one inch long) that stand out at a right angle from the plant. The flowers are grouped in bunches. The leaves are 3-6 inches long, soft, coming to points. The fruit are elongated capsules filled with small black seeds containing the oil. It blooms from June to September. As the name implies, the flowers are open in the evening.

Cultivation: A biennial, or annual in some climates up to Zone 4. Stratify seeds for several weeks and then sow directly in the soil outdoors in mid-spring. Seed requires light to germinate so should be scattered upon the soil surface, tamped in, then bottom-watered. You can also start these indoors earlier in the spring. Germinates in 15-20 days with an 80% success rate outdoors and 60% inside. In a soil temperature of 70-85F. Space plants 8-12 inches apart. Prefers well-drained garden soil which can be dry and a pH of 6-8. Full sun or light shade. Reseeds easily. The expressed seed oil requires enormous amounts of plant material. If grown for GLA production do not give high levels of nitrogen as it lowers GLA content. Yields of between 400-500 lbs per acre have been reported.

Constituents: Unsaturated fatty acids, including GLA.

History: First arrived in Europe in 1619 and was planted in the Padua Botanic Gardens of Italy. The botanical name comes from *oinos*, a Greek word for apertif, since other members of this genus were used by the Greeks to flavor wine. Not often used in European folk

medicine and only acclaimed medically in the 1980s when the concentrated oil was available. *Oenothera* is a name that Pliny used for a plant reputed to produce sleep when its juice was drunk in wine. The species name, *biennis*, means “lasting for two years,” indicating that the plant is a biennial. Evening primrose elixir repairs the chakra of the heart.

Properties: antiseptic, astringent, diuretic, sedative

Medicinal Uses: The tiny seeds were used as an unspecified medicine by the Forest Potawatomis. The Flambeau Ojibwas used the whole plant, soaked in warm water, to make a poultice to heal bruises. The Omahas also made a poultice from some part of the four-point evening primrose. GLA is responsible for many of the herb’s properties. It is an anticoagulant that is thought to reduce high blood pressure, prevent heart attacks and guard against coronary artery disease. A 1981 clinical study at the St. Thomas Hospital in London gave evening primrose oil to 65 women with premenstrual syndrome and 61% of the participants found their symptoms completely disappeared and another 23% felt partial relief. There was noticeable improvement in the skin conditions of 99 people with eczema when they were treated with evening primrose oil in a double-blind study. In another study, the oil was found to improve dry and brittle nails and combines with zinc treatments, it helped acne and dry eyes, as well as nails. In 1987, the Glasgow Royal Infirmary of Scotland saw improvement in 60% of its rheumatoid arthritis patients who took a combination of evening primrose and fish oil instead of their regular drugs. A study by the Highland Psychiatric Research Group at the Draig Dunain Hospital, Inverness, Scotland, found that evening primrose encouraged regeneration of liver cells damaged by alcohol consumption. Other researchers think it may also prevent alcoholic poisoning, hangovers, postdrink depression and alcohol withdrawal. It is thought to stop alcohol from damaging brain cells by bolstering them with unsaturated

fats. . A New York City hospital found that more than 10% of overweight people tested with evening primrose oil lost weight. In another study, two-thirds of hyperactive children studied responded favorably to the oil.

Evening primrose oil improved Parkinson’s-induced tremors in 55% of those who took the equivalent of 2 teaspoons a day for several months. Some studies suggest that GLA helps relieve symptoms of Raynaud’s disease. In one study, EPO was massaged into the fingers of people with Raynaud’s disease and about half improved.

The root, fresh or dried, is chopped and boiled slowly in twice its volume of honey to make a cough syrup. A tablespoon every 3 or 4 hours as needed. The tops can be used similarly. The herb possesses diuretic function and both root and herb have a sedative effect on some individuals. It has some laxative effect and can suppress both skeletal and smooth muscle pain, particularly in the reproductive organs. It can be a stimulant to the vagus nerve.

It is used as a kidney medicine in the American Southwest, particularly to relieve spasms and sharp pains of the bladder and urethra. The flowers, crushed in hot water, are used like a mustard plaster, spread on moist cheesecloth, and placed against these areas for discomfort of the throat and chest. The dried root made into a tea is helpful for menstrual cramps.

Flower Essence: O. hookeri: Evening Primrose helps to catalyze the emotional awareness of souls that are unable to radiate warmth and love from their own center, especially regarding the original, core incarnation experiences which were so devastating. Evening Primrose literally rebirths the soul, providing a matrix of emotional nutrients that were lacking in the soul’s earliest feelings about incarnation.

Toxicity: Headaches, skin rashes, and nausea have occasionally been reported. Not suggested for epileptics.

Culinary Uses:

The flavor of the flowers is similar to lettuce with a gentle perfume. Use to decorate salads, cream cheese, cucumber and all mild flavored foods. Pick the whole spike with the flowers attached and place in water until needed. These flowers close very quickly so place the vase with the spikes in full sun. Use them fresh. They are difficult to preserve. Remove the green to use. Can be used in bud or in full flower. The roots taste like sweet parsnips. They are edible at the end of the first year of growth of the plant. They can be eaten raw (grated if too fibrous) or cooked. They often tend to irritate the throat when they are eaten alone, even cooked. The leaves can be used as a cooked green.

Recipes:**Buttered Broad Beans with Evening Primrose Flowers**

1 lb baby broad beans
2 oz butter
1 tsp lemon juice
salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 Tbsp evening primrose petals
6 evening primrose flowers, whole, with green bits removed.

As the broad beans are going to be cooked in their pods they must be very young and the pods thin and not more than 4-5 inches long. Top and tail them and cut each diagonally into three or four pieces. Place in a colander and wash under cold water. Bring a large pan of water to the boil and place the drained beans into the pan. Bring back to the boil and cook for eight minutes or until tender, then drain. Return the empty pan to the heat and add the butter, followed by the broad beans. Toss, adding the lemon juice and seasoning. Add the flower petals and turn into a serving dish. Decorate with the 6 whole evening primroses and serve. (Good Enough to Eat)

Cucumber, Mint with Fromage Frais with Evening Primrose Flowers

2 large cucumbers

salt

¼ pint fromage frais
3 Tbsp spearmint, chopped
5 evening primrose buds, sliced
5 whole evening primrose flowers with green bits removed

Cut one cucumber into small dice. Peel the other and cut into finger-length pieces. Put all the cucumber pieces into a large colander and sprinkle with salt. Leave for at least 30 minutes, then rinse under the cold tap and pat dry in kitchen towel. In a bowl, mix the fromage frais with the mint, the diced cucumber and the sliced evening primrose buds. Put this mixture into a serving bowl, cover and chill. To serve, decorate with the finger-size pieces of cucumber and the whole evening primrose flowers. (Good Enough to Eat)

Evening Primrose Leaf Burgers

4½ cups chopped tender, young evening primrose leaves
4 ½ cups barley or whole-wheat flour
4 cups coarsely chopped, cooked, mashed wild or commercial carrots
4 cups chopped onions
3 cups cooked brown rice
3 cups water
2 cups fruit juice
2 cups roasted sesame seeds
½ cup sesame oil
3-5 Tbsp paprika
3 Tbsp miso
2 Tbsp fresh dill or 2 tsp dried dill
1 Tbsp oregano
1 tsp sea salt, or to taste

Mix all the ingredients together, shape into burgers, and sauté in sesame oil. You may need to add a little more barley or flour to get the right consistence for burgers that hold together. Good plain, with ketchup or with a light lemony sauce. Serves 12-14 (Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants)

Evening Primrose Root Chili

2 Tbsp olive oil
2 onions, diced

8 garlic cloves, minced
 2 tsp vegetable broth powder (optional)
 2 cups sliced evening primrose roots
 2 cups sliced wild or commercial carrots
 3 Italian frying peppers
 1 ½ cups cooked chili beans
 2 cups crushed tomatoes, including their juice
 2 cups pureed tomatoes
 ½ cup red wine
 2 Tbsp whole-grain flour
 ¼ cup chili powder
 6 wild or commercial bay leaves
 1 ½ Tbsp paprika
 ½ Tbsp each marjoram, cayenne pepper and black pepper
 1 tsp sea salt, or to taste
 ½ tsp cumin

Heat the oil in a large pot. Add the onions, garlic and broth powder. Sauté for 3 minutes over medium heat, stirring often. Add the carrots, evening primrose and frying peppers. Sauté for another 10 minutes, adding more oil if necessary. Add the remaining ingredients, and bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring often. Reduce the heat and simmer for 30-40 minutes. Cook covered for a thinner chili, or without a lid for a thicker chili. Serve immediately, or refrigerate overnight so the flavors can blend more, reheat, and serve. Serves 8. (Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants in Wild (and Not So Wild) Places)

Evening Primrose Root, Chinese Style

2 tsp soy sauce
 3 Tbsp dry white wine
 1 tsp sesame seed oil
 1 tsp cornstarch
 3 Tbsp vegetable oil
 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
 1 scallion, including some green, finely chopped
 1 tsp fermented black beans, finely chopped (optional)
 1 cup evening primrose roots, scrubbed and cut crosswise into 1/8 inch rounds
 1 small carrot, peeled and cut crosswise into 1/8 inch rounds

1 stalk celery, scrubbed, stringed and cut crosswise into 1/8 inch slices.

In a small bowl combine the soy sauce, wine, sesame oil and cornstarch. Heat a wok or iron skillet over high heat for 30 seconds. Add the vegetable oil and heat for another 30 seconds. Drop in the garlic, scallion and black beans and stir-fry for 15 seconds. Add the evening-primrose, carrot and celery. Stir-fry for 2 minutes or until the vegetables are just tender. Recombine the cornstarch mixture and add. Stir until thick and transfer to a serving platter. (The Wild Plant Companion)

Evening-Primrose and Veal with Madeira

8 very thin veal cutlets, trimmed of all fat and tenderized with a mallet or dull side of a knife
 flour
 2 Tbsp butter
 16 very small evening-primrose plants, roots with tops, washed. If using bigger plants, parboil them
 ¼ tsp salt
 ½ cup Madeira wine
 ½ cup water
 lemon sliced

Dredge the cutlets in flour and shake off the excess. In a 10-12 inch skillet, over moderate heat, melt the butter. When the foam subsides, quickly brown the veal on both sides, a few cutlets at a time. Remove those browned to a plate while doing the rest. Place the evening primrose in the pan, add the salt, Madeira, water and veal with any juice that have accumulated. Turn the heat to low and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes until the evening primrose is tender and the sauce is boiled down. Remove to a serving platter, pour the remaining sauce over the top and garnish with lemon slices (Wild Plant Companion)

Evening Primrose Root Soup

2 cups quartered evening primrose roots
 2 cups diced Jerusalem artichokes
 2 quarts water
 3 wild onions, halved
 6 bayberry leaves, dried and crumbled
 ½ tsp grated dried spicebush berries
 3 wild leeks, diced

2 Tbsp chopped fresh dillweed

Combine all ingredients (except the dill) in a large soup kettle. Cover and simmer for 40 minutes, add the dill, and simmer for 10 minutes more. Season to taste and serve hot. (Native Harvests)

References:

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Resources:

- Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com
- plants
- Crimson Sage, <http://www.crimson-sage.com>
- Plants
- Wood Violet Herb Farm, www.woodvioletherbfarm.com Plants

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