**Cnicus benedictus**  
[NYE-kus ben-uh-DICK-tus]

**Family:** Compositae

**Names:** Holy thistle, bitter thistle, spotted carduus, sacred thistle, bitterweed, blessed carduus, cursed thistle, our lady’s thistle, St. Benedict’s thistle, spotted thistle, Fuller’s Thistle; Drapacz Lekarski, Bernardynek (Polish); Bernardinerdistle (German); Chardon bénit (French); Cardo santo (Spanish)

**Description:** A prickly, rounded bush with a height of 2 feet and a width of 1.5 feet. The flowers are yellow, 1 ½ inches, partially concealed by the leaves. The leaves are prickly with pale veins, deeply indented with veins and surrounded by sharp, 1-inch spines. The fruit are sharp spines surrounding the seed pods filled with small seeds. Blooms from July to September.

**Cultivation:** Annual that germinates in 1-3 weeks. Space 12-14 inches. Soil temperature 65-70F for germination. Soil is dry, fairly poor is suitable. Full sun. Propagate by seed. The flowering top parts are collected before the flowers have passed their prime. Dry them in the shade and cut them up after drying. The seeds are collected in fall when the plant has set them.

**Constituents:** essential oil, bitters, sesquiterpene lactones (cnicin), alkaloid, lignans, polyacetylenes, flavonoids, triterpenes, phytosterols and tannins.

**History:** The Greeks called this herb *knekos* or thistle, which came to the Romans as *carduus benedictus*, or “blessed thistle,” because its virtues made it considered a cure-all. Others say the scientific name *benedictus* was given in honor of St. Benedict, who founded the religious order that bears his name and grew the plant. Many different formulas through the centuries used blessed thistle, including plague treatments. Monks in medieval Europe were very fond of blessed thistle and added it as a tonic to their elixirs and as a cure for smallpox. It was even said to strengthen the emotions, as Shakespeare knew when he wrote in *Much Ado About Nothing*, “Get you some of this distilled Carduus Benedictus and lay it to your heart; it is the only thing for a qualm...I mean plain holy thistle.” Included in the liqueur Benedictine.

**Properties:** A very bitter, antiseptic, antibiotic herb that acts mainly as a digestive tonic. It is also expectorant, checks bleeding, encourages healing, lowers fever and stimulates lactation.

**Medicinal Uses:** Blessed thistle has been used as a treatment for liver disorders, as well as menstrual problems. It seems to detoxify the
liver. In many European countries blessed thistle tablets are prescribed along with acetaminophen or aspirin to counterbalance the potential liver damage these drugs can cause. Many women take blessed thistle to regulate their periods. It seems to stimulate the appetite and many herbalists prescribe it to their anorexic patients. It is often combined with other herbs that are beneficial to the liver, such as milk thistle, artichoke or red clover. The leaves are considered one of the best herbs for increasing mother’s milk. Blessed thistle is antibiotic, destroying staph and other infections, although it has not proved very effective against harmful intestinal bacteria. Externally used as a healing balm for wounds and ulcers. Combines well with turtlehead and cola for anorexia and with meadowsweet, agrimony and cinquefoil for diarrhea.

**Combinations:**  
With peppermint, elder flowers, and ginger for colds, fevers, and backache.  
Indigestion due to a sluggish state of the digestive system: balmony and cola  
Diarrhea: meadowsweet and tormentil

**Dosage:**  
Infusion: pour a cup of boiling water onto 1 tsp of the dried herb and leave to infuse for 10-15 minutes. Drink 3 times a day  
Tincture: take 1-2ml of the tincture three times a day

**Homeopathy:** Homeopaths use *Carduus benedictus* for nausea, left-sided stomach pain, gallstones, surging of blood, homesickness, intermittent fever, and enlarged liver, especially when eye symptoms are present and there is a sensation of contraction in many parts

**Toxicity:** Avoid large dosages, which are emetic and laxative.

**Ritual Uses:** An herbe which holds the ability to help a priest move into the more positive aspects of men’s mysteries, blessed thistle is not known for its exceptional taste yet serves well in the ritual cup. It may be powdered and added to an incense mixture or tossed into the fire as an offering. When working with sexual magick, blessed thistle assists in bringing the potent sexuality of Pan to manifestation within the priest. It may also be used in general when invoking any of the fertility gods. It is sometimes associated with Yule, used to invoke the newly born Sun. It is an herb of protection used in the ritual bath. It is also used to counteract hexing. Thistle brings spiritual, physical and financial blessings. A shirt with thistle fibers woven into it will protect the wearer from any evil spell. The herb has been used to make magical wands and to conjure or communicate with spirits. Herbe of Mars and Aries.

**Culinary Uses:** It can be eaten raw in sandwiches and salads, or taken powdered in wine or tea.

**References:**  

**Resources:**  
Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com

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