**ELECAMPANE**

*Inula helenium*  
[IN-yoo-luh hel-EE-nee-um]

**Names:** Elfwort, scabwort, horsetail; wild sunflower, velvet dock, horseheal, aunee, aunse (French), alycompaine, elfdock, nurse-heal; Alant; Echter Alant, Griechenkraut, Alantworzel (German); inula campana (Italian); Deviat Sil (Russian); Xuan Fu Hua (Chinese); marchalan (Welsh); Omian (Wielki), dzewosiil (Polish); Chin Ch’ien Chu, Chin Ch’ien Hua, Elecampagne, Elecampane Inula, Elf Dock, Enula, Helenio, Helenium, Hsuan Fu Hua, Induzotu, Mu Xiang, O-Oguruma

**Pharmaceutical Name:** Radix Helenii

**Family:** Compositae

**Description:** Height to 6 feet. Flowers are daisylike, yellow with thin petals, to 4 inches. Leaves are stiff, large to 16 inches, hairy, with velvety undersides on thick hairy stems. The smaller, top, heart-shaped leaves clasp the stem. The roots are light gray, hard, grow from a crown. Aromatic, the taste is both bitter and sweet. Blooms from May to August.

**Culture:** It's a perennial to Zone 3. Germination is 3-4 weeks. Start from seeds sown indoors in late winter, then transplant in 8-12 weeks. Once plants have been established, the herb is best propagated from 2inch root cuttings taken in autumn from the buds of two year old roots. Cover the cuttings with moist, sandy soil and store for the winter in a cool indoor room. Plant the cuttings 2-3 feet apart after danger of frost has passed in rows 12-18 inches apart. Deeply cultivated soil produces the biggest roots. Elecampane likes, rich, moist, well-drained, slightly acid loam (pH of 4.5 to 7) and full sun or partial shade. Watch for plant bugs that suck the juices from leaves. Control them with a botanical insecticide like pyrethrin or rotenone. Collect roots for medicinal and culinary use in fall of the plant's second season, after several hard frosts. Older roots become too woody. To speed drying, slice roots into pieces. Dry them thoroughly before storing usually in 7-10 days. Yields of 2,000 to 3,000 pounds per acre of dry root are possible. Roots need to be chopped and washed thoroughly.

**History:** Legend has it that Helen of Troy carried a handful of elecampane on the fateful day the Trojan prince, Paris, abducted her from Sparta, igniting the Trojan War which is were the *helenium* comes from. Hippocrates said elecampane stimulated the brain, kidneys, stomach and uterus. The ancient Romans used it to treat indigestion. They also used it as both food and flavoring, adding it to sauces for its bitter, camphorlike flavor and to counter the effects of overeating. Traditional Chinese and Indian Ayurvedic physicians used elecampane to treat respiratory problems, particularly bronchitis and asthma. It was reputed to cure scab disease in sheep, where the name scabwort came from. It was also considered a panacea for horses giving it the name horseheal. It was the main ingredient in a medieval elixir known
as *potio Paulina* (drink of Paul) an allusion to St. Paul's biblical injunction to “use a little wine for thy stomach's sake.” Elecampane root was also candied and eaten as a confection. Lozenges combining elecampane and honey were used to treat whooping cough. Early American colonists naturalized elecampane and used it as an expectorant, digestive aid, menstruation promoter and diuretic for treatment of the water retention associated with congestive heart failure. Indian tribes in the Northeast adopted the plant for respiratory failure and tuberculosis. The 19th century Eclectic physicians used it as a diuretic and menstruation promoter but prescribed it primarily for asthma, bronchial and chronic pulmonary affections.

Elecampane candy is said to have been a favorite of Julia, daughter of Augustus Caesar. The Romans mixed the dried root with raisins, dates, and honey or vinegar for dessert. In the late Renaissance, hard elecampane confections were molded into shapes and English children were given bottles of a sweet drink composed of elecampane, licorice, sugar and water to enjoy on Easter Monday.

**Properties:** aromatic, anthelmintic, bactericidal, fungicidal, expectorant, sedative; stimulant; diaphoretic; diuretic; emmenagogue, expectorant, alterative, antiseptic, astringent, tonic, anti-spasmodic, chi tonic

**Energetics:** (root) sweet, acrid, bitter, warm (herb) pungent, bitter, warm

**Meridians/Organs affected:** lung, spleen

**Constituents:** Sesquiterpene lactones (bitter substances): the eudesmanolides alantolactone, isoaalantolactone, 11,13-dihydroalantolactone, 4,5-dihydro-5,6-dehydroalantolactone (= 1-desoxy-8-epi-ivangustin), and others, also germacrene D-lactone. The mixture of alantolactones is also known as helenin or elecampane camphor. Ca.1-3% essential oil containing alantolactone and its degradation products (alantol, alantic acid) as principal components, along with sesquiterpene hydrocarbons (including β-element). Polyacetylenes, aliphatic hydrocarbons (including monaconane), 8,9-epoxy-10-isobutyryloxythymol isobutyrate. Triterpenes: friedelin, dammaranedienol and its acetate. Sterols: β-sitosterol and its glucoside, stigmasterol. Up to 44% inulin, together with various degradation products.

**Medicinal Uses:** European scientists have discovered elecampane contains a chemical, alantolactone, that helps expel intestinal parasites and is better than santonin and less toxic (1 teaspoon of root to a cup of water, bring to boil and simmer 20 minutes, drinking up to 3 cups a day). It is also anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial, and fungicidal adding to its potential therapeutic action in the intestine.

All chronic lung conditions such as bronchitis and asthma are helped by it. It is generally mixed with other lung herbs (often white horehound, coltsfoot, pleurisy root and yarrow). It is a constitutional treatment for general catarrhal conditions such as chronic pulmonary affections that have symptoms of cough, shortness of breath, wheezing in the lungs, a specific for whooping cough in children, pneumonia, diseases of the breast and malignant fevers, hepatic torpor, dyspepsia and the feeling of stitches in the side caused by the spleen. It’s warming for a cold, wet cough. It doesn’t suppress the cough, but increases expectoration.

Elecampane produces an active principle called helenin, which is antiseptic and antibacterial, making the root useful in salves and surgical dressings. Elecampane contains an essential oil that consists primarily of sesquiterpene lactones. The root also contains the complex carbohydrate inulin. This starchy material swells and forms a slippery suspension when mixed with digestive fluids. The inulin soothes the lining of the digestive tract and provides the benefits of viscous fiber. It also apparently elicits a sympathetic expectorant response to mucous membranes of the respiratory system.
A bitter-aromatic tonic, elecampane root increases appetite and promotes digestion. Europeans with indigestion still sometimes sip on a cordial made by infusing the roots, sugar and currants in white port. In Russia, the whole root is preserved in vodka to store it for winter use. Soluble in alcohol and partially in water. Used in China for certain cancers. Wash used for facial neuralgia, sciatica. Experimentally, tea strongly sedative to mice.

In small doses, it lowers blood-sugar levels, but in large doses, it raises blood sugar, at least in experimental animals. The inulin in elecampane is an aromatic substance resembling starch. It is stimulating, expectorant, and antiseptic. Tends to cover the odor of garlic.

For a decoction, gently boil 1-2 teaspoons of dried powdered root in 3 cups of water for 30 minutes. Take 1 or 2 Tablespoons at a time with honey, p to 2 cups a day. In a tincture, use 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon up to 3 times a day. It should not be given to children under age 2.

REMEDY:
Decoction of Elecampane: 2 ounces of elecampane (cut), 1 quart of distilled water. Put the herb into the water and let stand for 2 hours. Bring to boil and simmer for 30 minutes, covered. Strain, then return liquor to saucepan and simmer until reduced to 3/4 pint. Add 4 ounces of pure glycerine. Let cool, bottle and keep in a cold place.

Dose:
1 tablespoon in an equal amount of water 3 or 4 times a day, between meals. Children: 1 teaspoon or more according to age, given in honey water.

Honey is a soothing and healing balm for children, and should be given freely to those with a tendency to catarrh. When making this formula especially for children, substitute 6 or 7 ounces of honey for the glycerine. Elecampane may be given in much larger doses in cases of chronic lung trouble; up to a teacupful. In all such cases, DO NOT ADD THE GLYCERINE. Make up the decoction fresh each day. When glycerine is used in a formula, the proportion should be a teaspoonful to a dose, no matter how large the dose. In order to increase its tonic qualities, and make it slightly laxative, add a teaspoonful of the compound syrup of mandrake at time of taking. To produce free perspiration, make the decoction, but leave out the glycerine. While the patient is well covered in bed, give as hot as can be tolerated in 1/2 teacupful doses until the patient perspires freely.

Breathe-Easy Tea for Asthma sufferers: 1 quart boiling water; 1 tsp each chamomile flowers, echinacea root, mullein leaves and passionflower leaves; 1/2 tsp each elecampane root and lemon verbena leaves. Pour boiling water over the herbs in a saucepan and steep for 10-15 minutes. Strain out herbs. Give as a preventive or a few times a day when breathing becomes strained or when emotional conditions may lead to an asthma attack. For children dosage is 1/2 cup tea for 50 pound child.

Tuberculosis Syrup
1 tsp elecampane root
1 tsp sage leaves
1 tsp goldenseal root
1 tsp Solomon’s seal
1 tsp horehound leaves
3 cups honey
1 lb honey

Combine the above herbs in a pan and cover with the water; bring to a boil for 20 minutes; strain. Combine the tea with the honey and heat on low. Stir to dissolve the honey; when dissolved, remove the mixture from the heat. When cool, pour into glass containers and seal. Take two tablespoons at a time, as needed.

Spring Tonic
1 tsp black cohosh root
1 tsp stone root
1 tsp elecampane root
3 cups water
honey

Combine the above herbs in a pan and cover with the water. Bring to a boil and boil for 30 minutes; cool and strain. You may want
to sweeten with honey. Take two to three tablespoons up to six times a day.

**Homeopathic Uses:** Homeopaths use Inula for diabetes, bronchial infections and "bearing down" sensations in the pelvic region with labor-like pains.

**Toxicity:** Since it has been used traditionally to promote menstruation, pregnant women are advised not to use it. Animal studies show that small doses of the herb lower blood sugar levels, but higher doses raise them which indicates diabetics should be careful of it. Normally non-toxic, non-irritant though sensitive individuals may develop a rash from skin contact with it or its oil. The alantolactones may irritate the mucous membranes. Large doses of the drug can lead to vomiting, diarrhea, cramps and symptoms of paralysis.

**Aromatherapy:**
**EXTRACTION METHOD:** essential oil by steam distillation from the dried roots and rhizomes. An absolute and concrete are also produced in small quantities
**CHARACTERISTICS:** a semi-solid or viscous dark yellow or brownish liquid with a dry, soft, woody, honey-like odor, often containing crystals
**BLEND WELL WITH:** canaga, cinnamon, labdanum, lavender, mimosa, frankincense, orris, tuberose, violet, cedarwood, patchouli, sandalwood, cypress, bergamot, and oriental fragrances
**USES:** The oil and absolute are used as fixatives and fragrance components in soaps, detergents, cosmetics and perfumes. Used as a flavor ingredient in alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and foodstuffs.

**Cosmetic Uses:** for blackheads and problem skin in a facial steam.

**Ritual Uses:** Gender--Hot; Planet--Mercury; element--water; basic power--love; Elecampane is burned as incense to bring joy and is worn to attract love. Add to love charms of all kinds, especially in conjunction with mistletoe and vervain. Along with it’s strong association with the elven world, the energy of this herbe can stimulate the inner child, but can also be capricious. It can be used to work with the eldritch and the devas. Language of Flowers: woe, sorry, "I cry for you".

**Other uses:** A blue dye is made by mixing elecampane with ashes and whortleberries.

**Culinary Uses:** Until about 1920, elecampane root was a common flavoring in English sweets, such as sugar cakes colored red with cochineal and the root itself was candied. Asthmatics would chew a piece in the morning and evening. Those who traveled by a polluted river sucked the root to protect them from the poisonous air. It is still used in some European wines and liqueurs, particularly vermouth, Absinthe and the French Vin d'Aulnee. It also has a long history as a brewing ingredient. The roots provide a sweet flavor similar to licorice. Use ¼ to 2 ounces of the dried root midway through the boil to add the licorice flavor.

**Recipes:**
**Elecampane Liqueur**
1 quart of fresh red currants
1 quart f good brandy
2 cups of candied elecampane roots

Crush the currants at a time, until they are thoroughly mashed. Add a half-cup of water and simmer for 10 minutes, then strain out the juice through a jelly bag. This will give you about 1 pint of bright-red juice. To this, add 2 cups of sugar while the juice is still hot, and stir until the sugar is thoroughly dissolved, then when cool, add the quart of brandy. Find 2 quart bottles with mouths wide enough so that you can get the elecampane into them and put a cup of Candied Elecampane into each. Pour the mixed brandy and currant juice over the elecampane, seal the bottles, store them in a dark place and don't touch them for a month. The longer the elecampane is left in, the stronger the flavor it imparts. Dispels melancholy and provokes mirth.
Elecampane Cordial
1 ¼ cup water
1 cup sugar
4 oz (about 2/3 cup) dried, chopped elecampane root
2 cups port wine

Make a sugar syrup with the water and sugar. When it is clear, add the elecampane root and lower the heat to a slow simmer. Simmer 10 minutes, then let the mixture cool to room temperature. Strain into a large jar. Add the wine. Mix and store as a remedy for colds and flu. (The Herbal Epicure)

Elecampane Candy
Put a half-teaspoon of baking soda and 1 cup of sugar into a saucepan, mix thoroughly, then add a half-cup of light cream. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat and cook, stirring occasionally, until it reaches the soft-ball stage, or shows exactly 234°F on your candy thermometer. Remove from heat, stir in 1 level tablespoon of butter, then stir in 1 cupful of candied elecampane root, chopped fine. Beat until thick—2 or 3 minutes—then drop by the teaspoonful on waxed paper and let harden.

Candied Elecampane
Cut each scrubbed root crosswise into 2 inch lengths, then slice each piece lengthwise into 4-8 segments. To 2 cups of prepared pieces add 2 cups of water and 2 cups of sugar. Bring to a boil then reduce the heat and barely simmer until the elecampane is tender. Drain the elecampane and bottle the syrup as a cough remedy. Allow the candied elecampane to dry on waxed paper for two days, then roll in granulated sugar, let dry another day and store in tight jars.

References:

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Medicinal Herbs in the Garden, Field & Marketplace, Lee Sturdvant and Tim Blakley, 1998, San Juan Naturals

Resources:
Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com
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