

Agrimonia eupatoria

[Synonyms : *Agrimonia asiatica*, *Agrimonia bracteosa*, *Agrimonia brittoniana*, *Agrimonia nepalensis*, *Agrimonia odorata*]

AGRIMONY is a perennial. Native to northern Asia, Europe (including Britain) and North America, it has small apricot-scented, bright yellow flowers.

It is also known as Aaron's rod, *Agrimonie* (Dutch), *Aigremoine* (French), *Aigremoine eupatoire* (French), *Akkermonie* (Afrikaans), Beggar's lice, Beggar's ticks, Church steeples, Clot bur, Cockeburr, Cocklebur, Cockle burr, Common agrimony, Country nun, Egrimony, Eupatorium, Fairy's wand, *Gewöhnlicher Odermennig* (German), *Gewone agrimonie* (Dutch), Golden rod, Harvest lice, *Herbe de St. Guillaume* (French), *Kleiner Odermennig* (German), *Konopěvec* (Czech), Lemonade, Lemonflower, Liverwort, *Llysliau'r Dryw* (Welsh), *Maarianverijuuri* (Finnish), Money-in-both-pockets, Philanthropos, Rats' tails, *Religieuse des champs* (French), *Řepiček* (Czech), *Repík lékářský* (Slav), *Řepík lékařský* (Czech), Salt and pepper, *Småborre* (Swedish), Stickweed, Sticklewort, Stickwort, Sweethearts, Tall agrimony, Tea plant, *Útrobník* (Czech), and *Vanlig småborre* (Swedish); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of thankfulness, and gratitude.

Eupatoria commemorates an ancient warrior and herbalist, Mithridates VI (c.132-63 BC) King of Pontus (northern Turkey), who was also named Eupator to distinguish him from his father. The last of his three Mithridatic Wars with Rome in which he was finally defeated by Pompey in 65 BC extended over 10 years. At his height Mithridates governed 20 odd nations and was said to be fluent in all their languages. He is reputed to have experimented on himself with different plants in order not only to identify their medicinal benefits but also, legend contends, to increase the immunity of his body to poisoning (understandable when one remembers that he killed his siblings, except his sister who he married, in order to secure his throne which he assumed in 120 BC). To achieve that immunity he is said to have developed, and taken daily, an all-embracing poison antidote which contained at least 36 ingredients (of which agrimony was one). This came to be known as Antidotum Mithridaticum or Theriac and was used, some claim, for 1900 years after his death and has since been referred to in poetry and prose. It was also the forerunner of potions that were eventually known as 'electuaries' and until the mid-19th Century these expensive panaceas (with their secret ingredients) were available throughout Europe under various names. His legendary anti-poisoning régime is relevant with regard to other legends about his death (which has also been the inspiration for a play by the French poet and dramatist, Racine (1639-1699), and an opera composed by Mozart (1756-1791), as well as historical novels). When his capture by Rome was imminent after the end of the Third Mithridatic War it would seem that he attempted suicide by taking poison (having in one version first given the drug successfully to those around him). But his antidote régime had worked too well and his body resisted the poison so, according to whichever legend followed, already weakened he had to ask one of his officers to complete the task with a sword or, unasked, some of those he had ordered to kill members of his family used their weapons to execute him too.

Around 1000 AD the Anglo-Saxons (who knew the plant as *garclive*) attributed almost magical

healing powers to it and sought it out especially for healing warts, snake bites and wounds.

In Britain in the Middle Ages belief in agrimony's magical powers still persisted. One conviction is encapsulated in the rhyme

If it be leyd under mann's head,
He shall sleepyn as he were dead,
He shall never drede ne wakyn
Till for under his head it be takyn.

By then faith in its healing powers in Europe was, if anything, greater – as herbalists almost viewed it as a panacea. Agrimony was one of the major ingredients in the renowned remedy for wounds, particularly those suffered in battle. The celebrated preparation at that time *eau de arquebusade* (*arquebusade* was the 15th Century word for 'musket' or 'arquebus') was referred to in a description given by Philippe de Comines (1445-1509) the French statesman and historian, of the Battle of Morat in 1476 when Swiss and French troops were fighting Burgundy.

The flowers and the stems are the source of a yellow dye. In North America they have also been used locally for tanning.

Veterinary medicine has been known to use the bruised fragrant leaflets to help heal sores.

Although cattle, pigs and horses will not touch the plant, it is eaten by sheep and goats.

Medicinally, until quite recently herbalists contended that an infusion of the dried leaves was a valuable tonic (particularly for rheumatism) and it used also to provide a gargle for singers and orators. In addition European herbalists recommended the plant for treating jaundice, liver disorders generally, kidney ailments, intestinal worms, period problems, colds, snake bites, warts and skin diseases. Colds were often cured with Agrimony wine, for which the agrimony was harvested during the Summer flowering season. While the Canadians and the Indians in North America are said to have used agrimony to treat fevers.

Today the plant is still used in European folk medicine and homoeopathy – and an infusion of it provides a mouthwash. Chinese research suggests that agrimony can increase blood coagulation by up to 50%: and both the Chinese and the Europeans use it to stem bleeding (the former especially when this is caused by excessive menstruation and the latter for disorders leading to blood in the urine and also for external wounds).