

*Artemisia vulgaris*

[Synonyms : *Artemisia heterophyllae*, *Artemisia indica*, *Artemisia superba*, *Artemisia vulgaris* var. *coarctata*, *Artemisia vulgaris* var. *indica*]

**MUGWORT** is a perennial. Native to Asia, and Europe (including Britain) it has greenish-yellow to reddish-brown flowers.

It is also known as *Afsnteen* (Urdu), *Almindelig gråbynke* (Danish), *Alsemsoort* (Dutch), *Amarella* (Italian), *Amwaz* (Creole), *Apple pie*, *Armoise* (French), *Armoise citronnelle* (French), *Armoise commune* (French), *Armoise vulgaire* (French), *Artemisa* (Spanish), *Artemisa común* (Spanish), *Artemisia* (Italian, Spanish), *Artemísia* (Portuguese), *Artemisia verdadeira* (Portuguese), *Arutemishia* (Japanese), *Assenzio* (Italian), *Assenzio selvatico* (Italian), *Baru china* (Javanese, Malay), *Beidiog Lwyd* (Welsh), *Beifuss* (German), *Bijvoet* (Dutch), *Bowlocks*, *Bulwand*, *Bulwand wormwood*, *Burot* (Norwegian), *Bylica* (Polish), *Bylica pospolita* (Polish), *Bynke* (Danish), *Cây ngải* (Vietnamese), *Chinese moxa*, *Chinese wormwood*, *Common mugwort*, *Common wormwood*, *Couronne de St.-Jean* (French), *Crni pelin* (Croatian), *Daun sudamala* (Indonesian), *Docko*, *Dog ears*, *Echter Beifuss* (German), *Erba di San Giovanni* (Italian), *Fat hen*, *Felon herb*, *Gall-wood*, *Gemeiner Beifuss* (German), *Gewöhnlicher Beifuss* (German), *Gewone bijvoet* (Dutch), *Gipsy's tobacco*, *Gråbo* (Swedish), *Grå bynke* (Danish), *Green ginger*, *Grey bulwand*, *Hërbe d'St Jean* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Herbe St. Jean* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Hierba de San Juan* (Spanish), *Hiya* (Malay), *Ilysiaw Ieuan* (Welsh), *Johanniskraut* (German), *Kotechu lalampa* (Thai), *Maiden wort*, *Machipatri* (Telugu), *Mashibattiri* (Tamil), *Migwort*, *Mogvurd*, *Moogard*, *Mother of herbs*, *Motherwort*, *Mugger*, *Muggert*, *Muggerth*, *Muggons*, *Mugweed*, *Mugwood*, *Mugwurz* (German), *Nagadamani* (Sanskrit), *Nagadona* (Bengali), *Nagadouna* (Hindi), *Ngãi círu* (Vietnamese), *Obični pelin* (Croatian), *Old uncle harry*, *Oushuu yomogi* (Japanese), *Pelyněk černobýl* (Czech), *Polyn' obyknovennaia* (Russian), *Pujo* (Finnish), *Sailor's tobacco*, *St. John's herb*, *St. John's plant*, *Sisim* (Spanish), *Smotherwood*, *Tarkha* (Punjabi), *Thuốc círu* (Vietnamese), *Uægte malurt* (Danish), *Vild malurt* (Danish), *Wal-kolondru* (Singhalese), *Wegwood*, *Wild wormwood*, *Wormwood*, *Y Fydiog Lwyd* (Welsh), and *Zona diri Johannis* (Spanish); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of happiness, and tranquility.

Warning – extended use in large doses can damage the nervous system. It should only be taken internally under the supervision of a qualified practitioner during pregnancy. The pollen can cause hay fever. It can poison some animals (no cases have been recorded in Britain) but it is usually avoided because of the smell, particularly by domestic animals.

*Vulgaris* means 'common'.

Since the 1<sup>st</sup> Century mugwort has been one of the plants used widely as an insect repellent.

This could be one of the reasons for its name, deriving it from the old Germanic word *muggiwurtri* meaning 'fly or gnat plant'. Another theory is that the name comes from *moughte* meaning 'moth' or 'maggot' because, like wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) it was often used as a moth repellent. Another suggestion contends that mugwort acquired this name from its use as a flavouring for drinks.

Once held in great esteem it was not only known as the Mother of Herbs but throughout Asia,

China and Europe it was revered in sorcery and was (in pre-Christian times) believed to be able to repel demons. Mugwort with chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*), crab apple (*Malus baccata*), fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare var. dulce*), greater plantain (*Plantago major*), stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*) and wood betony (*Stachys officinalis*) was one of the Nine Sacred Herbs for the Anglo-Saxons. They believed these plants could give protection against evil. This reverence persisted to the Middle Ages when it was one of the plants that participated in the celebrations of St. John's Eve and St. John's Day (23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> June) in so many countries in Europe. Branches were kept in the house to ward off the devil (a practice that persisted in the Isle of Man into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century), it was hung over the door to protect against lightning, and plague, fever and carbuncles as well, and it was placed under the doorstep to prevent annoying people from crossing the threshold. It was also believed that sleeping on a pillow of mugwort would result in a dream that would lay out the dreamer's future before him. At that time too a legend was told of how John the Baptist's sojourn in the wilderness in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD was aided by a girdle of mugwort he wore round his waist. This paralleled another belief that a traveller on foot would not tire if he put mugwort in his shoes or held a piece in his hand, and that the plant would give protection from the evil eye, sunstroke and wild beasts.

Mugwort's protection also extended to Christian churches as witnessed by 13<sup>th</sup> Century architecture. One authority points out some of the roof bosses in Exeter Cathedral (in the English West Country) that are carved with sprays of mugwort.

The House of Keys and the Legislative Council, the two branches of the Tynwald which is the ancient parliament of the Isle of Man, only sit together once a year on 5<sup>th</sup> July (having sat separately for the rest of that period). A traditional practice of wearing sprigs of mugwort at this annual open air meeting of the Tynwald Court went into abeyance until resurrected in the early 1950s. It has been suggested that the mugwort may once have been an emblem of the kings of Man or, when sported by soldiers at the Manx Parliament (Tynwald), a symbol of loyalty.

Buddhism has employed mugwort in its initiation ceremonies. During these it is burnt on the brow of a newly ordained priest – and it has also been used in incense.

In North America (where mugwort became naturalized after the Europeans had begun to settle on the Continent) the Kiowa North American Indian tribe of the central plains included the plant in their Peyote rituals. The leaves not only provided stuffing for worshippers' cushions, but they were also used to purify the skin by rubbing them on the face and hands. An unusual role for the leaves sprang up among Miwok Indians. It became the practice for weeping mourners to wear the leaves in their noses so that the penetrating smell could clear their heads.

The Miwok tribe also set great store in mugwort's protective powers. For them not only would the leaves protect the person carrying them from injury – but if they were rubbed on the body or the plant was worn as a necklace ghosts would be kept at bay (especially when handling a corpse) and any dreams of the recently deceased would be repelled.

As a medicine the plant had several uses for various North American Indian tribes. For the Tlingit Indians mugwort provided a remedy for pleurisy, while the Karok and Paiute tribes used it for treating colds, and the Miwok employed it for headaches and easing rheumatism. Mugwort was part of remedies used by the Paiute for some venereal diseases, the Pomo and Karok tribes used it during childbirth, and the former also turned to it for some period problems. The Kiowa Indians used mugwort for treating some worms.

Back in Europe it was also used as a strewing herb.

In the past European culinary interest in mugwort was synonymous with that of garden parsley

(*Petroselinum crispum*) today. It has been a familiar flavouring for meats (especially roast goose, duck or pork) as it aids digestion of the fatty food. In England it was also used for clarifying and flavouring beer (particularly home brews) up until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. And in Cornwall in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century they were still using the leaves as a substitute for tea (especially when the latter was expensive). In the past in Germany mugwort has provided a flavouring in sausage. Today in the Far East the leaves are used for flavouring food in China. In Japan the young plants are boiled and eaten as a vegetable, and are also used for flavouring dumplings and festival rice-cakes.

In some parts of Asia mugwort can be smoked as a tobacco substitute.

The plant was fed to poultry including turkeys and (roots as well) was much relished by sheep.

The enjoyment of the latter suggests to some pundits that this plant may be the *Artemisia* of Pontos that was used in classical times to fatten sheep.

Today the plant is used commercially as a bitters by the drinks industry in some alcoholic drinks.

Medicinally, herbalists used mugwort to treat epilepsy, St. Vitus's dance, fevers, hysteria, stomach disorders, fluid retention, jaundice, sciatica and cramp, but it was most widely associated with childbirth and period problems. (North American Indian tribes used the plant medicinally to ease headaches and wind and treat diarrhoea, rheumatism, fevers and epilepsy.) Today it can still be used in Western medicine in the treatment of anorexia, some period problems, indigestion and occasionally for expelling some types of worm – and is an ingredient used by the pharmaceutical industry in various proprietary medicines. In China mugwort is used in remedies for nausea and vomiting and it has also been part of treatment for opium (*Papaver somniferum*) addiction.

It is the birthday flower for 3<sup>rd</sup> November.