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### *Centaurea benedicta*

[Synonyms : *Benedicta officinalis*, *Calcitrapa benedicta*, *Calcitrapa lanuginosa*, *Centaurea benedicta*, *Carbeni benedicta*, *Carduus benedictus*, *Cirsium pugnax*, *Cnicus benedictus*, *Garbenia benedicta*, *Hierapicra benedicta*]

**BLESSED THISTLE** is an annual. Native to the Mediterranean and Europe it has violet-streaked, pale to mid-yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Acker-Schachtelhalm* (German), *Benedikt aptečnýj* (Russian), *Benediktenkraut* (German), *Benediktinertidse* (Danish), *Benedikt lékařský* (Czech), *Bitterdistel* (German), Bitter thistle, Blessed carduus, Cardin, *Cardo bendito* (Spanish), *Cardo benedetto* (Italian), *Cardo bento* (Portuguese), *Cardo santo* (Italian, Portuguese, Spanish), *Centauree bénie* (French), *Chardon béni* (French), *Chardon bénit* (French), *Cnicaut béni* (French), *Cnicus bénit* (French), Cursed thistle, Friar's crown, *Geseënde Dissel* (Afrikaans), *Gezegende distel* (Dutch), *Heiddistel* (German), Holy thistle, *Kardbenedikt* (Swedish), *Kardobenedikte* (German), *Kardobenediktenkraut* (German), *Kardo benita* (Esperanto), *Karvasohdake* (Finnish), *Kniko* (Esperanto), *Knikus blagoslovennyj* (Russian), *Korbendikt* (Danish), Lady's thistle, *Lægetidse* (Danish), Our Lady's thistle, Sacred thistle, *Safran sauvage* (French), St. Benedict's herb, St. Benedict's thistle, *Spinnendistel* (German), Spotted carduus, Spotted thistle, Stickers, Sweet sultan, and Thistle.

Warning – large doses can cause vomiting and diarrhoea.

*Benedicta* means 'well spoken of or blessed'.

It appears to have been in cultivation in Britain by the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and is said to be grown still in some parts of Europe, particularly Germany.

During the Middle Ages the thistle-like plant used to be viewed in Europe as a whole as a 'cure-all' and, with common centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*), was recommended in the treatment of epilepsy. It is also believed to feature in many European records concerning treatment of plague.

In the third Act of *Much Ado About Nothing* the famous English playwright, William Shakespeare (1564-1616), uses the medicinal qualities of blessed thistle for especial attention. By the time the play was printed in 1600 it had held a high reputation as a cure for plague for some many decades.

Margaret Get you some of this distilled Carduus Benedictus, and lay it to you heart; it is the only thing for qualm.

Hero There thou prick'st her with a thistle.

Beatrice Benedictus! why Benedictus? you have some moral in this Benedictus.

Margaret Moral? no, by my troth, I have no moral meaning; I meant, plain holy thistle. ....

In this extract he refers to the thistle by one of its botanical synonyms (*Carduus benedictus*) and one of its other common names (Holy thistle).

Oil was extracted from the fruit during both World Wars I and II. Oil cakes offer a source of animal fodder.

Today plant extracts can be found in commercial herbal liqueurs and apéritifs. Blessed thistle is also an ingredient in proprietary medicines and in herbal tea mixtures. Herbalists have recommended blessed thistle for treating stomach complaints, headaches, jaundice, worms and fevers, for encouraging milk in nursing mothers and as a general tonic. Blessed thistle was also used to heal sores, boils and venomous bites. Today it is taken internally for treating catarrh, indigestion and anorexia, and is also applied externally on ulcers and wounds. Tinctures are used in homoeopathy.