

Cynoglossum officinale

[Synonyms : *Lindelofia spectabilis*]

HOUND'S-TONGUE is an annual or biennial. Native to Europe it has small, dull reddish-purple (occasionally white) flowers.

It is also known as Beggars-lice, Beggars-ticks, Burgundy hound's-tongue, Canadian burr, *Cinogloso oficina* (Esperanto), Common hound's-tongue, *Cynoglosse* (French), Dog-bur, Dog's tongue, *Echte Hundszunge* (German), Field hound's tongue, *Gewöhnliche Hundszunge* (German), Gipsy flower, Gypsy flower, *Hundtunga* (Swedish), *Langue-de-chien* (French), Little burdock, Mouseleaf, Navelwort, *Psojazyk lekársky* (Slovak), Rats and mice, Rose noble, Scaldhead, Sheeplice, Stick seed, Stick tights, Sticky buds,) *Tafody Bytheiad* (Welsh), Tory bur, Tory weed, *Užanka lékařská* (Czech), Wood mat, and Woolmat.

Warning – all parts of the plant are potentially poisonous. Hound's-tongue may cause dermatitis. Internal use should only be under the supervision of a qualified practitioner. (Caution in use is recommended as the plant has not been checked fully, scientifically and in large doses it would appear to affect the central nervous system.) It is poisonous for some animals – although rabbits would appear to be immune as their population has been relied upon in the past to keep growth of hound's-tongue under control.

Apart from its spiny fruit hound's-tongue has a similar appearance to both bugloss (*Anchusa officinalis*) and henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*).

Officinale means 'of the shop (usually the apothecary's or herbalist's)'. Certain plants used for medicinal purposes, whether of actual or legendary value, were kept readily available and acquired this name.

The English name Rose noble is said to be a pun that some authorities claim not only acknowledged hound's-tongue's medicinal virtues but its worth. In other words the plant's value equalled that of the English gold coin that bore a rose – the rose noble that was first minted in the latter part of the 16th Century during the reign of Edward IV (1442-1483). Hound's-tongue smells a little like mice which accounts for the English West Country name Rats and mice. (Yet in some parts of Europe particularly Switzerland the leaves are said to have been eaten in salad or as a cooked vegetable.)

In England in the 16th Century the barber-surgeon and herbalist (the latter as a charlatan for many authorities), John Gerard (1545-1612) tells how it was believed that with the plant laid under your feet (or, more precisely, a leaf immediately under the big toe), dogs would not bark at your passage.

Hound's-tongue came to be known to some North American Indian tribes, and the Iroquois absorbed it into their range of medicinal remedies. It was not only used in treatment for leg cancers, some venereal diseases and running sores, but it was also taken internally to ease some kidney disorders and tuberculosis.

Animal poisoning has occurred in several countries from this plant. In Britain rabbits have generally kept the growth of hound's tooth in check but with the outbreak of myxomatosis in the mid-1950s so many rabbits died that the plant flourished. This led to some disasters eg. a herd of Friesian cows feasted on the plant and several died after severe poisoning.

Medicinally, herbalists recommended the root for treating piles, coughs and colds, and the leaves were used in remedies for dysentery and for healing sores, burns, skin diseases and wounds (particularly from rabid dogs). It also provided yet another remedy for baldness. Although it is rarely employed in folk medicine today, tinctures are still administered in homoeopathy.