

Doronicum pardalianches

[Synonyms : *Doronicum cordatum*]

LEOPARD’S-BANE is a perennial. Native to central Europe it has small, daisy-like, yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Alpgemsrot* (Swedish), Crayfish, Great false leopardbane, Great leopard’s bane, *Kamzičnik srdčitý* (Czech), *Klostergemsrot* (Swedish), *Kriechende Gemswurz* (German), *Lleopard-dag* (Welsh), and *Vårkrage* (Swedish).

Warning – some authorities believe the plant is poisonous.

Pardalianches is derived for some authorities from Greek words *pardalio* (leopard) and *-anche* (strangle) components with reference to their belief that the plant was once used to ‘strangle’ wild animals.

It is believed that the Romans introduced it to Britain. In the Middle Ages it was an important ingredient in a particularly poisonous mixture that was used to exterminate vermin in the countryside.

Leopard’s-bane was a traditional component of witches’ brews.

Conrad Gesner (1516-1565), a Swiss naturalist and physician, collected over 500 plants which had not been described in ancient records, and was said to have conducted experiments with them on his own body. He actually died from plague while preparing his latest readings and on the morning of his death recorded that he had taken some leopard’s-bane and fasted. But the story goes that two hours after taking the leopard’s-bane he wrote to a friend and mentioned his own excellent health, and about one hour later was taken ill and died. John Gerard (1545-1612), the English, barber-surgeon and herbalist (the latter as a charlatan for many authorities), was 20 when Gesner died and apparently discounted in writing the poisonous claims made about the plant by describing occasions when leopard’s-bane had been eaten with enjoyment and no ill effects.

One of its less dramatic but believed effective uses was as an addition to a foot-bath (when a few drops of tincture were added to a bowl of hot water).