

Eupatorium perfoliatum

[Synonyms : *Cunigunda perfoliata*, *Eupatorium chapmanii*, *Eupatorium connatum*, *Eupatorium coronatum*, *Eupatorium perfoliatum* var. *colpophilum*, *Eupatorium perfoliatum* var. *cuneatum*, *Eupatorium perfoliatum* forma *laciniatum*, *Eupatorium perfoliatum* var. *perfoliatum*, *Eupatorium perfoliatum* forma *purpureum*, *Eupatorium perfoliatum* forma *trifolium*, *Eupatorium perfoliatum* forma *truncatum*, *Eupatorium salviaefolium*, *Eupatorium salviifolium*, *Eupatorium truncatum*, *Eupatorium virginianum*, *Uncasia perfoliata*, *Uncasia truncata*]

BONESET is a perennial. Native to eastern North America, it has tiny, dull white (occasionally blue) flowers.

It is also known as Agueweed, Common boneset, Common thoroughwort, Crosswort, *Durchwachsenblättriger Wasserhanf* (German), Eupatorium, Feverwort, Indian sage, Joe pye, Marsh sage, Sweating plant, Teasel, Thorough growth, Thoroughstem, Thorough wax, Thoroughwort, Vegetable antimony, Wild isaac, Wild sage, and Wood boneset; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of delay.

Warning – large doses of any part of the plant can cause vomiting and purging.

Perfoliatum means ‘with leaves surrounding or embracing the stem’.

Although it is said by some to have gained its name after being used in the treatment of a particularly virulent form of ‘flu’, which occurred in the United States and was called ‘break bone fever’, other authorities suggest that the name arose earlier still. According to the latter the Doctrine of Signatures would seem to have been invoked by the herbalists of the time. As *perfoliatum* implies, boneset’s stem seems to pierce the leaf and apparently this could have indicated the plant’s value in setting bones.

Although the majority of uses found for boneset by North American Indian tribes are positive ones, some authorities have noted that the Iroquois are said to have used boneset to poison an enemy’s drinking flask in order to kill him. On the other hand the Chippewa Indians applied the root fibres to whistles blown by the hunters to attract deer. The Iroquois tribe also used boneset in witchcraft and in divination rituals.

As a veterinary medicine the plant was used to treat fever in their horses by the Iroquois Indians.

The Indian tribes put the plant to a variety of medicinal uses. Authorities refer specifically to the Iroquois and Abnaki tribes as having used boneset to aid the healing of broken bones. From records the plant seems to have been particularly popular as it was used by the Shinnecock, Delaware, Iroquois, Cherokee, Nanticoke, Mohican, Menominee, and Seminole Indian tribes at one time or another for easing fever. The Penobscot, Iroquois and Micmac Indians all prescribed it for various kidney disorders, and some venereal diseases. It provided a treatment for typhoid fever, pleurisy, headaches, piles, and pneumonia for the Iroquois Indians – and they also employed it as a laxative. With the Koasati tribe, the Iroquois have also used it as a remedy for some urinary problems. It was a cure for various period disorders for the Iroquois and Chippewa tribes, and the former, as well as the Mohican and some of the Delaware Indians, all used it to treat stomach upsets. The Cherokee turned to it for colds and sore throats – and according to records the Shinnecock, Iroquois and Mohican tribes all chose it at one time or another

for colds too. The Meskwaki solved worms with it, the Cherokee found it helpful in dealing with fluid retention, the Penobscot used it to stem internal bleeding, and the Chippewa eased rheumatism with it. The Seminole Indians, and the Koasati and Cherokee all employed the plant to cause vomiting, and the Cherokee also used it as a purgative and for causing sweating. It was turned to by both the Meskwaki and Chippewa tribes for use on snake bites (rattlesnakes especially in the case of the Chippewa). As if this were not enough boneset was also taken as a tonic by both the Rappahannock and Mohican tribes.

The plant was introduced to Europe in 1699.

In the 19th Century in North America boneset played a similar and, it is suspected by some, far more effective role than that of hot lemon tea today for treating coughs and colds. The plant was viewed as a remedy for intermittent fevers, for indigestion (especially in the elderly), for tapeworm and as a tonic – and it was a particular favourite with Negroes in the American South. Today its main areas of use are in respiratory disorders (such as colds, catarrh and bronchitis), and for skin diseases.