

*Leonurus cardiaca*

[Synonyms : *Cardiaca vulgaris*]

**MOTHERWORT** is a perennial. Native to Europe and the Mediterranean it has small, white or pale pink to purple flowers with a purple-spotted lip.

It is also known as *Aartgespan* (Dutch), *Agripalma* (Italian), *Agripaume* (French), *Buřina srdečník* (Czech), Common motherwort, Cowthwort, Cow-wort, *Echtes Herzgespann* (German), *Herbe battudo* (French), *Herzgespannkraut* (German), *Hjärtstilla* (Swedish), Lion's ear, Lion's tail, *Löwenschwanz* (German), *Mamllys* (Welsh), *Nukula* (Finnish), *Picot* (Channel Islander-Guernsey and Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Roman motherwort, *Srdečník obecný* (Czech), and Throw-wort; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of concealed (secret) love.

The flowers are pollinated by bees.

Warning – contact can cause dermatitis. It must not be used during pregnancy.

*Cardiaca* is derived from Greek *cardio-* (heart) component meaning 'of the heart' with reference to some of the medicinal remedies for which it was used.

The common name Motherwort reflects the old belief that the plant could ease anxiety during pregnancy and recent scientific research has shown that it does actually have sedative properties.

Two Chinese legends illustrate the confidence the Far East placed in motherwort's ability to prolong life. One tells how a concoction of motherwort was taken daily by a 7 year old emperor, whose death had been predicted within 7 years and who survived beyond 70 years of age. The other depicts the life of a youth who had been banished to a valley for a minor crime. Daily this young man drank from the only water supply available and lived for three centuries. The water in the stream brushed motherwort plants growing on the banks as it wound its way through the valley.

As a heart tonic it would seem now that the Chinese stories could actually be a little more than legend as recent preliminary Chinese studies lend some support to the use of motherwort for treating cardiac disorders.

Although in the West the plant's reputation was founded solidly on medicinal use, it seems that it still managed to attract a following who were convinced of its powers to repel evil.

Motherwort yields a dark olive-green dye.

This plant was used in veterinary medicine for treating cattle.

It came to be known to some of the North American Indian tribes and several of them absorbed it into their medicinal repertoires. It was used by the Micmac, Mohican, Shinnecock and Delaware Indian tribes to treat various female disorders, the Iroquois took it to counter indigestion, and the Cherokee prescribed it for some stomach upsets as well as both a sedative and a stimulant. It was also taken as a tonic by the Mohican and Iroquois Indians.

From at least the time of the ancient Greeks to the present day this European plant has been called upon to treat pregnant women for nervous disorders such as anxiety. It has also been used for treating asthma, bronchitis, diarrhoea, fevers, spinal disease, heart disorders, urinary ailments, convulsions and rheumatism, and has been given as a tonic as well. Today motherwort is used in homoeopathic treatment.

It is the birthday flower for 25<sup>th</sup> January.