

Marrubium vulgare

[Synonyms : *Marrubium album*, *Marrubium apulum*, *Marrubium germanicum*, *Marrubium hamantum*, *Marrubium hamatam*, *Marrubium propirquum*, *Marrubium vulgare* var. *lanatum*]

WHITE HOREHOUND is a perennial. Native to Asia, North Africa, central and southern Europe, the Mediterranean and the Canary Islands, it has small, whitish flowers.

It is also known as *Andorn* (German, Swedish), *Bilá buřina* (Czech), Candy weed, Common hoarhound, Common horehound, Cough weed, Croup weed, *Gemeiner Andorn* (German), *Gewöhnlicher Andorn* (German), *Gotteshilfe* (German), *Herbe à la vierge* (French), Hoarhound, Horehound, *Hortelã-do-Maranhão* (Portuguese), Houndbene, Houndsbane, *Hurtanminttu* (Finnish), *Jablečník obecný* (Czech), *Jablečník vonný* (Czech), *Kransborre* (Swedish), *Llwyd y Cŵn* (Welsh), Marble plant, *Mariennessel* (German), Marrhue, *Marrobio* (Italian), *Marrube* (French), *Marrubija bajda* (Maltese), *Marrubio* (Italian, Spanish), *Marrubium*, *Marubio ordinara* (Esperanto), Marvel, *Orâne* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Pahari gandana* (Hindi), *Samaritánka* (Czech), *Weisser Andorn* (German), *Weisser Dorant* (German), White hoarhound, Wild horehound, Woolly horehound, and *Zelená šedivka* (Czech).

Vulgare means ‘common’.

An uncommon alleged quality attributed to white horehound in days gone by was to say the least strange. Apparently dogs never barked at passers-by who were wearing white horehound in their shoes.

The Jewish Passover Supper includes white horehound as one of the bitter herbs in the traditional meal.

In the past this perennial was believed to be able to break magic spells. But this could be viewed as the least part of its reputation.

For thousands of years (certainly from the time of the Egyptian Empire when it was dedicated to the god of sky and light, Horus and called the ‘seed of Horus’) white horehound has been used as a cough remedy and as a treatment for malaria, as a remedy for reducing fevers generally and as an antidote for vegetable poisoning. It was also familiar medicinally in the classical world, and was one of the remedies adopted by Hippocrates (c.460-377 or 359 BC), the Greek physician, who came to be christened the Father of Medicine.

As an insecticide the 1st Century Roman agrarian author, Lucius Columella, stated that flies could be killed with a strategically placed dish of white horehound in fresh milk. He also claimed that white horehound was a cure for cankerworm in trees.

In Britain there are records that show that the plant was once used to make ale and today it can be a commercial ingredient in spirits.

After white horehound came to be known to North American Indian tribes the Diegueño Indians produced a sweetmeat by mixing the leaves with honey – and some of the Navajo Indians fed the plant to their sheep which imparted a bitter taste to the meat.

Perhaps as much as across the Atlantic, North American Indian tribes including the Hopi absorbed the plant into their medicinal repertoire. In the Diegueño and Cherokee tribes the plant was thought to be sufficiently gentle, yet effective, for it to be given to children.

Cherokee, Kawaiisu, Rappahannock, Digueño and Round Valley Indians all used it to treat colds, and the Mahuna, Kawaiisu, Costanoan, Cherokee, Yuki and Rappahannock Indian tribes all prescribed it for coughs. It was turned to by some of the Navajo as a remedy for influenza, it could be chosen by the Kawaiisu Indians for lung disorders generally, the Costanoan and Digueño tribes both treated whooping-cough with it, and Cherokee, Navajo and Mahuna Indians all used it for easing sore throats or hoarseness. The plant was a Round Valley Indian remedy for diarrhoea, some of the Navajo chose it as a remedy for some stomach upsets, and the Cahuilla used it for treating various kidney disorders. Some of the Navajo and also the Cherokee prescribed it in treatments for some female problems – and the Costanoan Indians applied a leaf salve to boils, and the Isleta used a leaf poultice to ease rheumatism.

Medicinally, herbalists recommended it for treating fevers, coughs, colds, asthma and other respiratory ailments such as some forms of tuberculosis. It also provided a remedy for wounds and bites from rabid dogs, as well as other venomous bites. Today it continues to be popular both in folk and herbal medicine not only for bronchitis and coughs but also as a tonic. It is also used in the manufacture of Horehound candy.