

*Melilotus officinalis*

[Synonyms : *Melilotus alba*, *Melilotus albus* var. *annuus*, *Melilotus arvensis*, *Melilotus graveolens*, *Melilotus leucanthus*, *Melilotus lutea*, *Melilotus melilotus-officinalis*, *Melilotus officinalis* var. *micranthus*, *Melilotus petitpierreanus*, *Melilotus suaveolens*, *Melilotus vulgaris*, *Trifolium melilotus officinalis*, *Trifolium officinale*]

**RIBBED MELILOT** is a sometimes trailing, annual to perennial. Native to Asia and Europe it has very small pea-like, light yellowish flowers.

It is also known as *Äkta sötväppling* (Swedish), *Amur* (Swedish), *Aspurk* (Hindi), *Balsam flower*, *Banpiring* (Bengali), *Bärenklee* (German), *Common melilot*, *Corn melilot*, *Couronne royale* (French), *Echter Steinklee* (German), *Gebräuchlicher Honigklee* (German), *Gelber Steinklee* (German), *Gemeine Steinklee* (German), *Gewöhnlicher Steinklee* (German), *Goldklee* (German), *Gul sötväppling* (Swedish), *Gwydro Rhesog* (Welsh), *Hart's clover*, *Hart's tree*, *Hay flowers*, *Heartwort*, *Honeyclover*, *Honigklee* (German), *King's clover*, *King's crown*, *Komonica lekárska* (Slovak), *Komonice lékařská* (Czech), *Melilot*, *Métilot* (French), *Melilotenklee* (German), *Meliloto* (Italian, Spanish), *Meliloto oficina* (Esperanto), *Melotengräs* (Swedish), *Mirliro* (French), *Moonseed*, *Mottenklee* (German), *Nakhoona* (Urdu), *Plaster clover*, *Rohtomesikkä* (Finnish), *Sötväppling* (Swedish), *Steinklee* (German), *Sweet clover*, *Sweet lucerne*, *Tall mellilot*, *Trèfle de cheval* (French), *Tréfoil* (French), *Wild laburnum*, *Wild yellow sweet clover*, *Yellow melilot*, *Yellow millet*, *Yellow sweet clover*, and *Yellow trifoli*.

The flowers yield essence and distilled water.

Warning – all parts of ribbed melilot are potentially poisonous. Large doses can cause vomiting, haemorrhaging, diarrhoea and death. It can be poisonous for some animals, primarily cattle.

*Officinalis* 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.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century ribbed melilot was a popular fodder crop in Europe and also North America (where it was introduced in the early 1700s both for fodder and as a soil improver).

However it is generally discounted today particularly in Europe in favour of other varieties such as the Hubam clover (*Melilotus alba* var. *annua*) as ribbed melilot can be poisonous for some animals, particularly cattle if it is consumed in large quantities.

Ribbed melilot was once used as a strewing herb. But perhaps beyond anything the plant gains highest respect as a honey plant. In the past it has been an ingredient in perfume and when dried it has also been included in snuff and tobacco mixtures as a flavouring. Ribbed melilot has been spread among linen to scent it and has also been packed in with furs as it was believed to be a moth repellent that had the added advantage of scenting the pelts. Today it provides a flavouring on a commercial scale for the tobacco industry.

Ribbed melilot used to be a flavouring in herb beer. And it is said that the Kalmucks, peoples of a Mongolian race in China and Russia, eat the roots. The leaves are used still to make the Swiss green cheese, Schabzeiger, in Gruyère (which makes use of a local blue variety, *Melilotus caerulea*) and in curd cheeses.

In North America both the Dakota and Iroquois Indians hung bunches of the plant inside or added the yellow flowers to flower arrangements for their fragrance. Some of the Keresan Indians put the plant in their bedding as an insect repellent. It also provided medicine for a few tribes. Some of the Navajo Indians used it to ease colds, while the Iroquois applied it to sunburn or facial pimples.

Medicinally, the clover (particularly ribbed melilot) has had varied uses. At one time it was thought that its juice when dropped in the eyes would clarify sight and the Greek physician, Galen (c.130-c.201), who early in his career treated gladiators at Pergamum in Asia Minor, and before he died had been physician to three Roman Emperors, prescribed melilot plasters to any of his patients suffering from swollen joints or inflammatory tumours. This form of plaster was still being used in Continental Europe at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Herbalists have also recommended ribbed melilot for easing headaches, rheumatic and abdominal pain, wind and burns, skin ulcers and sores.