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Ononis spinosa

[Synonyms : *Ononis campestris*, *Ononis procumbens*]

SPINY RESTHARROW is a perennial. Native to Europe it has large rose or white flowers. It is also known as *Anonide* (Italian), *Arrestabue* (Italian), *Arrête-bœuf* (French), *Babí hněv* (Czech), *Bonaga* (Italian), *Bugrane* (French), *Busktörne* (Swedish), Cammock, *Cas Gan Arddwr* (Welsh), *Dornige Hauhechel* (German), Erect restharrow, *Gatuña* (Spanish), Ground furze, *Ihlica trnístá* (Slovak), *Jehlice* (Czech), *Jehlice trnitá* (Czech), Land whin, *Mužská láska* (Czech), *Ononis épineuse* (French), Petty whin, Prickly restharrow, Restharrow, Stayplough, Stinking Tommy, *Vochlice* (Czech), and Wild liquorice.

Spinosa is Latin (thorn, spine) meaning ‘spiny’.

The name Restharrow came about because the plant’s matted roots hindered the progress of the harrow.

In Europe the young shoots used to be pickled or boiled, and eaten in salads.

A Christian tradition holds that this was the plant (or one of them) from which the Crown of Thorns (worn by Jesus on the Cross) was plaited.

Spiny restharrow acquired a magical reputation in some remoter areas in the Jura mountains in Switzerland. Here it used to be said that the plant could make horses drop their shoes.

Its medicinal qualities, especially for easing bladder disorders and gallstones, were familiar both to Pliny the Elder (23-79) the famous Roman natural historian, and to the 1st Century Greek physician, Pedanius Dioscorides. In 16th Century Italy the Venetian physician and botanist, Pietro Andrea Matthioli (1501-1577) was prescribing root bark in wine for similar problems.

Medicinally, particularly in central Europe herbalists used to recommend spiny restharrow for treating bladder complaints, gall stones, gout, delirium and skin diseases such as eczema. Today it can be used primarily for urinary ailments.