

Ophioglossum vulgatum

[Synonyms : *Ophioglossum arenarium*, *Ophioglossum bulbosum*, *Ophioglossum microstichum*, *Ophioglossum mironovii*, *Ophioglossum polyphyllum*, *Ophioglossum pringlei*, *Ophioglossum pycnostichum*, *Ophioglossum vulgatum* var. *pycnostichum*]

ADDER’S-TONGUE is a deciduous fern. Native to North Africa, North America, Asia and Europe, it has a leaf-like frond through which rises a sharply pointed green spike.

It is also known as Adder’s spear, Adder’s tongue fern, *Almindelig Slangetunge* (Danish), Christ’s spear, Common adder’s tongue, English adder’s tongue, Fern, *Echte Natterzunge* (German), *Gewöhnliche Natternzunge* (German), *Hadí jazyk obecný* (Czech), *Hadilka obecná* (Czech), *Herbe sans couture* (French), *Jazyk hadí* (Slovak), *Jazyk hadí* (Czech), *Langue de serpent* (French), *Lingua di serpe* (Italian), *Ormtunga* (Swedish), Serpent’s tongue, Snake tongue, Southern adder’s tongue, and *Yilan dili* (Turkish); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of jealousy.

Its appearance has similarities to that of an lords-and-ladies (*Arum maculatum*).

Vulgatum means ‘common’.

Adder’s-tongue was once considered to have evil powers and was believed to be used by witches. It was also thought that it could harm cattle, as well as the grass in which it can be found growing.

The fern was an ingredient in an ointment used in veterinary medicine to ease inflammation on cows’ udders.

Medicinally, herbalists used the leaves and their juice in the treatment of snake bites and other external and internal wounds, as well as a remedy for vomiting, and oral or nasal bleeding. They also believed that it was a cure for tumours if it had been picked during the phase of a waning moon. Nicholas Culpeper (1616-1654), the famous English physician, recommended it with other plants for easing sore eyes. The fern was particularly respected for healing wounds and certainly just prior to World War II in the 20th Century if not since Green Oil of Charity (in which adder’s-tongue was an ingredient) was still in demand for this purpose.

Today the plant is considered to be of historical importance only.