

Oxyria digyna

[Synonyms : *Oxyria elatior*, *Oxyria reinformis*, *Oxyria reniformis*, *Rheum digynum*, *Rumex digynus*]

ALPINE MOUNTAIN SORREL is a perennial. Native to northern temperate regions (including in North America, Greenland, northern Europe embracing Britain and northern Asia), it has many tiny greenish or reddish flowers.

It is also known as *Alpen-Säuerling* (German), Alpine sorrel, *Amlu* (Punjabi), Bitter sorrel, Boreal, *Fjällsyra* (Swedish), *Fjeldsyre* (Danish), *Hapro* (Finnish), *Kaksivartaloinen hapro* (Finnish), Mountain sorrel, Sorrel, Sour dock, *Šťoviček dvoublizný* (Czech), and *Suran y Mynydd* (Welsh).

The flowers can be pollinated by the wind, and the seeds are distributed by wind and by insects such as ants.

Warning – large quantities of the leaves are poisonous and can cause haemorrhaging, diarrhoea and nutritional deficiency. It should not be taken by anybody prone to gout, rheumatism or kidney stones.

Digyna is derived from Greek *di-* (two, twice) and *gyno-* (female) components meaning ‘with two ovaries’.

The leaves have provided food, raw or cooked, for Alaskans, the Montana North American Indian tribe and many of the Inuits (Alaskan, Arctic, Greenland and Inuktitut). Some Inuit tribes preserve the leaves in seal oil for later use.

Authorities note that some deer, and snails and caterpillars, are representative of animals, molluscs and insects that avoid the plant not least because of its bitter taste. However the leaves are eaten by caribou, elk, musk-oxen and geese which appear to be undeterred – and Arctic hares and lemmings are said to enjoy the fleshy underground stems.

It is hardly surprising to learn that the leaves were eaten locally raw in salads or cooked as a potherb, particularly as a scurvy preventative, when authorities note now that it is a source of vitamin C. Some authorities have suggested that it can be preserved for later use in sauerkraut.

Alpine mountain sorrel has been cultivated as an ornamental plant.

Medicinally, the leaves (a rich source of Vitamin C) have been recommended locally for countering scurvy.