

Petasites hybridus

[Synonyms : *Petasites officinalis*, *Petasites ovatus*, *Petasites vulgaris*, *Tussilago hybrida*, *Tussilago petasites*]

BUTTERBUR is a semi-aquatic perennial. Native to Europe and Asia it has small pinkish-violet or yellowish flowers.

It is also known as *Alan Mawr* (Welsh), *Bardana* (Italian), Batterdock, Blatterdock, Bog rhubarb, Bogshorns, Burblek, Burn-blade, Butcher's rhubarb, Butterburn, Butter dock, Cap-dockin, *Chapeau du diable* (French), Clack, Cleat, Clots, Clouts, Cluts, *Deväťsil hybridný* (Slovak), *Devětsil lékařský* (Czech), *Devětsil zvrhlý* (Czech), Dummies, Early mushroom, *Echte Pestwurz* (German), Elden, Eldin-docken, Ell-docken, *Erba dei tignosi* (Italian), *Etelänruttojuuri* (Finnish), Flea dock, Flapperdock, Gallon, *Gemeine Pestwurz* (German), *Gewöhnliche Pestwurz* (German), Gipsy's rhubarb, *Herbe aux teigneux* (French), *Kel-otu* (Turkish), Kettledock, Lagwort, Langwort, Ox-wort, Pestilence-weed, Pestilence-wort, *Pestilensrot* (Swedish), Pestilentwort, *Pestilenzwart* (German), *Pestilenzwurz* (German), *Pestrot* (Swedish), *Pestskråp* (Swedish), *Pestwurz* (German), Plague flower, Poison rhubarb, *Rød Hestehov* (Danish), *Rote Pestwurz* (German), *Skråp* (Swedish), Snake's food, Snake's rhubarb, Son-before-the-father, Sweet-scented coltsfoot, Turkey rhubarb, Umbrella leaf, Umbrella plant, Umbrellas, Water docken, *Wilder Rhabarber* (German), and Wild rhubarb.

Warning – some authorities do not recommend its use internally because of some of its constituents.

Butterbur's leaves are similar in appearance to those of colt's-foot (*Tussilago farfara*) but the latter's are larger and have a more rounded outline.

Hybridus means 'hybrid or mixed'.

The name Butterbur suggests that the large leaves were used once for wrapping butter in hot weather, whereas the French name *Chapeau du diable* reflects the shape of the huge broad leaves.

Butterbur featured in one of the European customs turned to by some young ladies who wished to see who their future husband might be. A young lady would plant the seeds in an isolated place thirty minutes before sunrise and as she did so would recite

I sow, I sow,
Then come, my own dear,
Come here, come here,
And mow and mow.

At this point unless she feared the result and spoke the words
Have mercy upon me
she would see the man she was to marry.

In 17th Century Britain ladies in society used skin lotions for which butterbur was an ingredient. Apparently butterbur was particularly popular with Swedish apiarists who planted it around their hives to provide early nectar for their bees.

Disciples of the 16th Century fashionable dogma known as the Doctrine of Signatures believed that butterbur came under the domination of the Sun and that this predicated its use medicinally as a heart strengthener.

Medicinally, butterbur has been relied upon in the past for treating some nervous disorders, coughs, colds, fever, asthma, and urinary infections – as well as stammering. European records of 1685 also indicate its alleged successful use in the treatment of plague. Today it is little used in folk medicine but it is used in homoeopathic treatments.