

*Polygonum bistorta*

[Synonyms : *Bistorta major*, *Bistorta officinalis*, *Persicaria bistorta*, *Polygonum bistortum*, *Polygonum lapidosum*, *Polygonum regelianum*]

**COMMON BISTORT** is a perennial. Native to Europe and Asia it has tiny pink (occasionally white) flowers each with prominent stamens.

It is also known as Adderwort, *Adderwortel* (Dutch), *Almindelig slangeurt* (Danish), *Anârif* (Arabic), *Ancubar* (Turkish), *Andrelles* (French), *Angubâr* (Arabic), *Bistort*, *Bistorta* (Italian), *Bistorte* (French), *Çiançik* (Turkish), *Dock*, *Dragonwort*, *Easter giant*, *Easter ledger*, *Easter ledges*, *Easter magiants*, *Easter mangiant*, *Easter maygiants*, *Easter mentgions*, *English serpentry*, *Feuillotte* (French), *Gentle dock*, *Goose grass*, *Knöterich* (German), *Konnantatar* (Finnish), *Kurd pençesi* (Turkish), *Langue-de-boeuf* (French), *Llys y Neidr* (Welsh), *Matterknöterich* (German), *Meadow bistort*, *Meeks*, *Mou-mêng* (Chinese), *Oderwort*, *Ormrot* (Swedish), *Osterick*, *Passion dock*, *Passions*, *Patience dock*, *Pencuir kale*, *Pink pokers*, *Poligono bistorta* (Italian), *Poligono ritorto* (Italian), *Poor man's cabbage*, *Pudding dock*, *Pudding grass*, *Quan can* (Chinese), *Quan liao* (Chinese), *Rdest wesownik* (Polish), *Red legs*, *Renouée bistorte* (French), *Schlangen-Knöterich* (German), *Serpentaire* (French), *Serpentaire rouge* (French), *Slangeurt* (Danish), *Snake root*, *Snakeweed*, *Stor omrot* (Swedish), *Sweet dock*, *Twice writhen*, *Ussitatar* (Estonian), *Water ledges*, *Wiesenknöterich* (German), and *Zi can* (Chinese); and in flower language is said to be a symbol for horror, and patience.

Warning – its acrid juice can irritate the skin.

*Bistorta* is derived from Latin *bis* (twice, in two) and *torti-* (twisted, turned) components with reference to the tortuous underground stem and roots and is an old Latin name.

The plant used to be a valuable source of Spring food in northern countries, particularly in times of famine. Not only have the starchy roots been steeped in water and then roasted (the North American Cheyenne Indians added them to soups and stews) but they have also been a source of bread flour. Some Alaskan Inuits ate the roots raw (or cooked) – and they also ate the raw leaves in salad or preserved them in seal oil for later use as an accompaniment for meat. The North American Aleut Indian tribe took the root as a tonic.

In the Lake District in England common bistort is always an ingredient in the traditional 'Easter-ledge puddings' particularly eaten during the last two weeks of Lent in the Christian calendar. (This also explains some of the other common names such as Passion dock.) The pudding is a savoury, vegetable-like dish generally made to accompany veal and bacon.

Common bistort only began to be used medicinally from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Herbalists recommended it for the treatment of tuberculosis but its effect was never verified. It has also been used for treating cholera, diabetes, diarrhoea, dysentery, lung and stomach haemorrhages, bowel complaints and snake bites. As a dry powder herbalists have also chosen it to stem bleeding wounds and have applied it as a wash to skin disorders.

Today it is still used in folk medicine and it is also used in veterinary medicine.