

Polygonum hydropiper

[Synonyms : *Persicaria hydropiper*, *Persicaria schinzii*, *Polygonum hydropiper* var. *hispidum*, *Polygonum hydropiper* var. *longistachyum*]

WATER-PEPPER is an annual. Found in Europe it has small green or reddish flowers with pink, white or yellow edges.

It is also known as *Akantatar* (Finnish), Arcmart, Arsemart, Arsesmart, Arsmart, *Beni tade* (Japanese), *Bidende pileurt* (Danish), Biting knotweed, Biting know-weed, Biting persecaria, Biting tongue, *Bitterblad* (Swedish), *Bitterknäa* (Swedish), *Bitterpilört* (Swedish), *Bittertong* (Dutch), Bity tongue, Bloodwort, Bog ginger, Ciderage, Common smartweed, Culrage, Curage (English, French), Doorweed, *Duizendknoop* (Dutch), *Erba pepe* (Italian), *Fulful el mâ'* (Arabic), *Goretc perichnyi* (Russian), *Hon la liao* (Chinese), *Jungfrutvål* (Swedish), *Katkeratar* (Finnish), *Knöterich* (German), Knotweed, Lakeweed, *La liao* (Chinese), *Liao* (Chinese), Marsh pepper, Marshpepper knotweed, Marsh pepper smartweed, *Mõru kirburohi* (Estonian), *Packur-mul* (Bengali), *Pakarmul* (Bengali), *Pepe d'asino* (Italian), *Pepe del povero* (Italian), Pepper plant, *Pfeffer-Knöterich* (German), *Pimenta de agua* (Portuguese), *Piment d'eau* (French), *Pimienta acuática* (Spanish), *Pimienta de agua* (Spanish), *Poivre d'eau* (French), *Poligono acre* (Italian), *Poligono pepe d'acqua* (Italian), *Poligono piperino* (Italian), *Râm nuóc* (Vietnamese), *Rdest ostrogorzki* (Polish), Red knees, Red leaves, Redshanks, Red sharks, *Renouée acre* (French), *Renouée poivre d'eau* (French), *Shui liao* (Chinese), Sickweed, Smartarse, Smartass, Smartweed, Snakeweed, *Su biberi* (Turkish), *Tcheurrage* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Tinboeth* (Welsh), *Vasspepar* (Norwegian), *Vattenpeppar* (Swedish), *Vattensåpa* (Swedish), *Vodyanoi peretc* (Russian), *Wasserpfeffer* (German), *Wasserpfeffer-Knöterich* (German), Water smartweed, *Waterpeper* (Dutch), Wild buckwheat, *Yanagi tade* (Japanese), and *Zangabîl el kilâb* (Arabic),.

The plant contains an acrid pungent juice with a burning pepper-like taste.

Warning – the juice can cause inflammation (even blisters) and should only be used in commercially prepared preparations under the supervision of a qualified practitioner. The plant is potentially poisonous (although it should be noted that no official record of poisoning is known in Britain). It can be poisonous for animals eg. pigs, horses and sheep.

Hydropiper is derived from Greek *hydro-* (water) and the genus name *Piper* (pepper) with reference to both the aquatic habitat and the similarity of the flower-spike to pepper.

One use for water-pepper (that underlies many of the common names) was as a flea repellent. Apparently to this end it would often be scattered over say bedding – and any bare skin that touched it would smart.

Various traditions and remedies have been recorded for water-pepper. Not least among these was the conviction that long journeys could be survived without hunger or thirst if a small bunch of water-pepper was placed under the horse's saddle. Another which relied upon the belief that worms in the ear caused earache offered relief from this pain once a few drops of juice were inserted by contending that the juice destroyed the worms.

The peppery seeds have been used as a condiment. The young leaves have provided a flavouring for food in Malaysia, and in the south-eastern peninsula of Asia (often referred to as Indo-China) the more acrid-tasting shoots have been used similarly.

In parts of Asia the dried root has been used to dress wounds on cattle to keep the flies off. In North America the Iroquois Indians gave their horses a plant decoction to counter wind. Older members of the Iroquois tribe spiced dishes with the fresh plant as if it were pepper (*Piper nigrum*) and the Cherokee Indians ate cooked sprouting shoots as a vegetable.

The plant was also a source of medicine for a few Indian tribes. Records show that the Iroquois Indians used it to treat fever, headaches and indigestion and that Cherokee Indians prescribed it for treating diarrhoea and some urinary disorders. It was also a Malecite remedy for fluid retention.

Medicinally, herbalists have recommended the plant for use in the treatment of coughs, colds, dysentery, gout, bowel disorders, jaundice, fluid retention, epilepsy, some nervous disorders, gangrene, snake bites and skin ulcers. It has also been used to treat various skin disorders (including ringworm), piles and earache and the root has been chewed to ease toothache. In North America it has provided a remedy for cholera and in Mexico a cure for rheumatism and fluid retention. Today it can be used to treat some period problems and it is also used in homoeopathy.