

Potentilla erecta

[Synonyms : *Potentilla tormentilla*, *Tormentilla erecta*]

TORMENTIL (English, Danish, German) is a perennial. Native to western Asia, to Europe and Siberia it has small yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Aert-bark* (Scots Gaelic), *Aufrechtes Fingerkraut* (German), *Barr braonannan-con* (Scots Gaelic), Biscuits, *Blodrot* (Swedish), Bloodroot, *Blutwurz* (German), *Braonan bachlag* (Scots Gaelic), *Braonan fraoch* (Scots Gaelic), *Braonan nan con* (Scots Gaelic), Cinquefoil, Common tormentil, *Eartbar* (Scots Gaelic), Earthbank, English sarsaparilla, Erect cinquefoil, *Esquinancée* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Ewe daisy, Field cinquefoil, Five-finger-blossom, Five-finger-grass, Five fingers, Five-leaved grass, Flesh and blood, *Galgan* (Czech), *Hèrbe à paralysie* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Krevník* (Czech), *Leanartach* (Scots Gaelic), *Leannartach* (Scots Gaelic), *Mochna nátržník* (Czech), *Nátržník* (Czech), *Nátržník rovný* (Slovak), *Nátržník vzpriamený* (Slovak), *Potentille officinale* (French), *Přetržník* (Czech), *Rätvänä* (Finnish), Red root, Septfoil, Sheep's knapperty, Shepherd's knapperty, Shepherd's knot, Snake's head, Star, Starflower, Thormantle, *Tormentila* (Portuguese), *Tormentill* (German), *Tormentilla* (English, Italian, Spanish), *Tormentille* (French), *Tormentilo* (Esperanto), *Tormenting root*, *Tresgl y Moch* (Welsh), *Tržené kořeni* (Czech), and Upright septfoil.

Warning – tormentil must be used internally with care. Externally prolonged contact with the skin should be avoided as this can cause scarring.

Erecta means 'upright or erect'.

Tormentil was once used in tanning, particularly in areas with few trees. In Scotland it was applied to fishing nets often as an alternative to oak bark (*Quercus*). While in Ireland records show that The Royal Dublin Society was encouraging its use in 1750 because of a scarcity of other suitable bark at that time. And in Lapland thickened root juice was applied as a red stain on leather. It is still valued as a dye at the beginning of the 21st Century as it can be an ingredient in the manufacture of artists' colours.

Today in The Faeroes tormentil is found as a schnapps flavouring which at the same time colours the liquor red.

It has also been used as a tooth powder and it was this fact that drew an explorer's attention to a similar practice by the women of Lima, only they used Peruvian rhatany (*Krameria triandra*). Co-incidentally it was found subsequently that the root bark of rhatany yields a red colouring matter that seems to be similar to the substance obtained from tormentil root.

In the 16th Century tormentil was used to treat wind (the Latin word for wind is *tormina*). Prior to this the plant's medicinal value seems to have been unremarked. Now it would appear that for economic reasons tormentil has been superseded as an ingredient in some proprietary preparations by rhatany (*Krameria triandra*).

It is still widely used in European folk medicine. Herbalists used to recommend it in the treatment of diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera, plague, measles, smallpox, fevers, whooping-cough, piles, wind and wounds. Today it can still be used as a remedy for diarrhoea and in the form of a lotion a treatment applied to ulcers and sores.

