

Scrophularia nodosa

[Synonyms : *Scrophularia lanceolata*, *Scrophularia marylandica*, *Scrophularia nodosa* var. *americana*, *Scrophularia nodosa* var. *marylandica*]

COMMON FIGWORT is a perennial. Native to Europe it has small greenish-brown to dark purple flowers.

It is also known as Bee plant, Brennet, Brown-net, Brownwort, Brunnet, Bullwort, Carpenter's square, Crowdy-kit, Cut finger, Fairies' beds, Fiddle, Fiddlers, Fiddlesticks, Fiddlewood, Figwort, Figwort root, *Flenört* (Swedish), Great pilewort, Hasty roger, Heal-all, *Herbe dé cràmpe* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Herbe du siège* (French), Holme's weed, Kernelwort, *Knoldet Brunrod* (Danish), *Knoten-Braunwurz* (German), *Knotige Braunwurz* (German), Knotted figwort, Knotted root, Knotty-rooted figwort, *Krtičník hlíznatý* (Czech), Lanceleaf figwort, Maryland figwort, *Melyn y Gwanwyn* (Welsh), Murrian grass, Pilewort, Poor man's salve, Rosenoble, Scaribeus, *Scrofulaire nouveuse* (French), Scrofula plant, Square stalk, Squarrib, *Stinkender Heinrich* (German), Stinking Christopher, Stinking Roger, Throatwort, *Vanlig flenört* (Swedish), Western figwort, and Woodland figwort; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of neglected beauty.

Wasps pollinate the flowers.

Warning – it is poisonous and can only be used by a qualified practitioner. It is very poisonous for some animals.

Nodosa is Latin (knobbly, knotty) meaning 'with conspicuous nodes or joints'.

In 1627 Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) the French prelate and statesman, sent a garrison to lay siege to the Huguenot town of La Rochelle. It took 15 months for this town to surrender to the royal troops and in that time the garrison itself ran short of food. Supplies were augmented for quite a long period with the unpleasant smelling and tasting common figwort root and from then on the plant came to be known as *Herbe du siège*.

The plant was held in such high esteem in some European countries that it was believed that carrying it on one's person would ward off illness. (The root's unpleasant smell probably kept people away.)

At some point it was introduced to North America and there it was adopted by the Iroquois and Meskwaki Indian tribes who identified various medicinal uses for the root in particular.

The plant was used by them for treating various female problems (mainly connected with childbirth) and in remedies for fluid retention, sunstroke, sunburn and frostbite.

Medicinally, herbalists used to recommend the plant for the treatment of 'scrofula' (a form of tuberculosis) and also problems such as tumours, piles, leprosy, worms, wounds, bruises, inflammation and swellings, gangrene and internal and external bleeding. Today it is mainly a folk medicine remedy for some skin ailments, although it can be an ingredient in some proprietary medicines, and can be used in homoeopathic treatments.

It is the birthday flower for 15th August.