

*Tussilago farfara*

**COLT'S-FOOT** is a perennial. Native to North Africa, to northern and western Asia and to Europe, it has golden-yellow flower heads with orange-yellow centres.

It is also known as Ass's foot, *Babuška* (Czech), Baccy plant, British tobacco, Bullsfoot, Butterbur, Calves' foot, *Carn yr Ebol* (Welsh), Clatterclogs, Clay-weed, Cleat, Cleets, Clote, Cofleyblowse, Colt herb, Common coltsfoot, Coughwort, Cow-heave, Disherlagie, Donnhove, Dove-dock, Dummy weed, *Fanjiwun* (Urdu), *Farfaraccio* (Italian), Fieldhove, Flower velure, Foal's-foot, Foalswort, *Følfod* (Danish), Ginger, Ginger-root, Gowan, Hallfoot, *Hästhov* (Swedish), *Hoefblad* (Dutch), Hogweed, Hoofs, Horsefoot, Horsehoof, Horse's hoof, *Huflattich* (German), *Koňské kopyto* (Czech), *Leskenlehti* (Finnish), *Ličko mateří* (Czech), *Lopušice* (Czech), *Mat i matcheha* (Russian), *Pas d'âne* (French), *Podběl lékařský* (Czech), *Podbel liečivý* (Slovak), *Podběl obecný* (Czech), *Podbílek* (Czech), *Podkova* (Czech), Poor man's baccy, Son-before-father, Sow-foot, Sweep's brushes, Tushalagies, Tushalan, Tushy lucky, *Tussilage* (French), *Tussilago* (Swedish), *Úbytník* (Czech), *Watapana* (Hindi), *Watpan* (Punjabi), *Wilder Rhabarber* (German), Wild rhubarb, Yellow stars, and Yellow trumpets; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'justice shall be done', and maternal care.

The flowers are pollinated by bees and flies.

Warning – there is some controversy on the safety of colt's-foot if taken internally. (In Germany in 1989 about 2,500 products using plants containing an alkaloid that could cause liver damage were banned. There are traces of this alkaloid in colt's-foot and the Germans are now considering restricting as opposed to banning its use.)

Colt's-foot's leaves are similar in appearance to those of butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*) but those of colt's-foot are larger and have a more rounded outline.

*Farfara* is derived from an ancient name for white poplar (*Populus alba*) meaning. 'like white poplar' with reference to the leaves.

The very old common name Son-before-father (*filius-ante-patrem*) refers to the appearance of the flowers before the leaves, while the common name Colt's-foot makes reference to the shape of the leaf.

In Summer the hairy seed head (which used to provide a soft stuffing for pillows and is collected by goldfinches to line their nests) was used as a weather forecaster. Rain would be predicted if the down was dispersed without wind.

The soft down on the underside of the leaves rubs off easily. Before matches were invented this was collected, mixed with saltpetre and dried in the sun for use as tinder.

When young the leaves have been added to soups and when older they have been cooked as a vegetable.

At some point it reached North America and there it was absorbed into the medicinal repertoire of the Iroquois Indian tribe. They used it as an ingredient in a treatment for coughs and for tuberculosis.

Today the tobacco industry can use the flowers for curing pipe tobacco.

Medicinally, today as in ancient Greece and in Roman times colt's-foot continues to be an important herbal remedy for coughs. Records show that the Greeks and the Romans smoked it (in the same way that it is included in herbal mixtures even now) to ease

coughing and it has since been used for treating asthma, catarrh and other respiratory ailments. General recognition of the effectiveness of this plant as a remedy would have been seen in the past from the use of the colt's-foot flower as an emblem over the door of Parisian pharmacies to indicate the efficacy of medicines available there. Colt's-foot is still used today in some countries for treating respiratory disorders.