

PLEURISY ROOT



Asclepias tuberosa

[ass-KLE-pee-us too-ber-OH-suh]

Family: Asclepiadaceae

Names: Butterfly Weed, butterfly milkweed, colic root, immortal, swallow wort, wind root, tuber root, Canada root, chigger flower, fluxroot, Indian nosy, orange apocynum, orange milkweed, orangeroot, orange swallow-wort, rubber root, silkweed, tuberous-rooted swallow-wort, rubber root, white root, wind root, wind weed, wine tree

Description: Butterfly weed is a 2' tall herbaceous perennial that dies back in winter and re-sprouts from its underground tuber each spring. The brilliant orange or red flower clusters appear in mid-summer. These are followed by attractive green pods that open to release silky "parachutes" to drift away on autumn winds. Butterfly weed is unique among milkweeds in that the sap is not milky and the leaves are not opposite. Many flowers have an inner whorl of petals, called the corolla, and an outer whorl of sepals, called the calyx. These are the showy, colorful parts of a typical flower. The milkweeds are special: they have a

third whorl above the corolla called the corona. The caterpillars of monarch butterflies (they're the ones that migrate to Mexico each winter) feed only on milkweed foliage. Adult butterflies of many species sip nectar from the beautiful blossoms of butterfly weed. The rootstock is slightly annulate, with a knotty crown. The roots are longitudinally wrinkled, grayish-brown externally, whitish internally, composed of concentric cylinders of tissue which can easily be separated. The taste is nutty and bitter, the odor faint.

Cultivation: Butterfly weed occurs naturally in open woods and fields throughout the US east of the Rocky Mountains. It prefers well-drained sandy soils with a pH of 4-5. Butterfly weed is a trouble-free perennial that will come up year after year in the same place without crowding its neighbors. It germinates in 3-4 weeks with a spacing outdoors of 12-18 inches. Soil temperature at seeding is best at 68-75F. It prefers full sun but can tolerate partial shade. Plant by seed or divide the roots in the spring or autumn. Mature plants are difficult to transplant because their fleshy, long taproots break easily, but with extra care, they can be moved. It takes about 3 years for a colorful flower display. Tolerates drought. Butterfly weed is slow to emerge in spring, so you may want to mark where they are.

History: An old medicinal herb first used by Native Americans, butterfly weed was included in Samuel Stern's *American Herbal* of 1772. For a short while, it was official in the *US Pharmacopoeia*.

Properties: alterative, antihypertensive, anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, aperient, bradycardic, carminative, cathartic, diaphoretic,

diuretic, emetic, expectorant, laxative, nervine, parasympathomimetic, peripheral vasodilator, tonic, uterine vasodilator

Constituents: Cardenolides and flavonoids. Glycosides (asclepiadine), resins, essential oil, bitters (asclepione). It is estrogenic.

Energetics: bitter, acrid, cool

Meridians/Organs affected: lungs, colon

Medicinal Uses: Although it has fallen into disuse, butterfly weed was a well-recognized remedy for all sorts of lung ailments, including bronchitis, consumption, typhoid fever, and pleurisy. It is a lung tonic that relieves congestion, inflammation, and difficult breathing by increasing fluidity of mucus in the lungs and bronchial tubes. It promotes the coughing up of phlegm, reduces inflammation and helps reduce fevers by stimulating perspiration. A warm tea of butterfly weed relieves digestive disturbances, diarrhea and dysentery. The settlers learned of its use from the Native Americans, who chewed the raw root to alleviate lung problems. They also put the powdered roots on wounds to stop bleeding and pounded fresh roots into a poultice to place on bruises, rheumatism, inflammation, and lameness in the legs. It has also been used to treat certain uterine problems and estrogenlike components have been reported.

Solvent: boiling water

Traditional use: amenorrhea, arthritis, asthma, bronchitis, cancer, circulatory disorders, colic, common cold, croup, debility, dry cough, dyspepsia, dysentery, eczema, emphysema, fever, gallbladder disorders, gonorrhea, hyperemia, hypertension, hysteria, influenza, intercostal neuralgia, menstrual disorders, muscle spasms, pleurisy, pleurodynia, pneumonia, pneumonitis, rheumatism, ringworm, tumor, warts, wounds

How the herb is taken: Pleurisy Root Extract: ¼ to 1 teaspoon 3 times a day. Always take with plenty of juice or with water at mealtime, unless instructed otherwise.

Combinations:

Respiratory congestion: cayenne, lobelia and grindelia

Remedies:

For Cuts:

1 tsp pleurisy root

1 tsp ginseng root

2 cups water

Combine the above herbs in a pan and cover with the water; bring to a boil and boil for 20-30 minutes; strain. Apply topically, as needed.

Nerve Tea for Stress

1 tsp powdered ginger

1 tsp powdered valerian root

1 tsp powdered pleurisy root

2 cups boiling water

Combine the above herbs in a nonmetallic container and cover with the boiling water/ steep for 30 minutes; cool and strain. Take one tablespoon at a time, as needed, up to two cups a day.

Pleurisy Tea

2 tsp boneset

3 tsp licorice root

2 tsp elder flowers

4 tsp pleurisy root

3 cups water

Combine the above herbs in a pan and cover with the water; bring to a boil; reduce heat; simmer for 10 minutes; strain. Take up to one cup a day, a tablespoon at a time.

Cough and Cold Formula

2 slices fresh ginger

2 tsp pleurisy root

1 cup boiling water

Combine the herbs in a glass container; pour one cup of boiling water over the herbs; steep for 30 minutes, cool, and strain. Take a tablespoon at a time, up to two cups a day. This tea is good for bronchial congestion.

Homeopathic: Tincture of fresh root is used for alopecia, asthma, bilious fever, bronchitis, catarrh, chancre, colic, cough, diarrhea,

dysentery, headache, affections of the heart, influenza, ophthalmia, pericarditis, pleurisy, pleurodynia, rheumatism, scrofula, syphilis

Toxicity: Do not take during pregnancy. Excessive doses may cause vomiting.

Other Uses: Butterfly weed's flowers produce a yellow dye and were used by eastern Native Americans to color their baskets. The interesting seedpods are used in wreaths and other dried flower arrangements. Some American Indian tribes made fiber and bowstrings from the stalks.

References:

The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants, Andrew Chevallier, Dorling Kindersley, 1997; ISBN: 0-7894-1067-2

The Illustrated Herb Encyclopedia, Kathi Keville, Mallard Press, 1991; ISBN: 0-7924-5307-7

Secrets Native American Herbal Remedies, Anthony J Cichoke, Avery Books, 2001; ISBN: 1-58333-100-X

Resources:

Companion Plants, 7247 No Coolville Ridge Rd., Athens, OH 45701; 740-592-4643; www.companionplants.com plants, seed

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