

## Love Herbs, or Did They Really Use That?

A look at herbs purportedly used to embolden, encourage, enrapture, ensnare, increase fertility, ban barrenness, induce and/or sustain lust, as well as herbs promoting or protecting chastity and purity. Class for Haire Affaire 2009

### **Coriander** *Coriandrum sativum*

Once used in love potions and as an aphrodisiac and to arouse passion,<sup>1</sup> it is now used primarily as a culinary herb.

### **Ginseng**-- *Panax Ginseng* (Asian species) *Panax quinquefolius* (North American Species)

Especially known for its supposed aphrodisiacal properties based on the fact that the root has a human shape. "Traditionally, ginseng has been used to enhance sexual desire, by promoting sex hormone production. Ginseng supports the natural balance of your body to combat fatigue and strengthens and protects your nervous system."<sup>2</sup>

### **Galangal**—*Alpinia spp*

A plant of Southeast Asia, whose root has a "ginger" flavor, was once used as an aphrodisiac.<sup>3</sup>

### **Henbane**-- *Hyoscyamus niger*

Despite its deadly properties, it was reputed as an aphrodisiac.<sup>4</sup> A member of the nightshade family, it was considered to be a witch's herb, but "witches were not the only ones to take pleasure in the aphrodisiac properties of this plant. Apparently, incense prepared from the seeds was commonly burned in mediaeval bath-houses."

### **Lovage**--*Levisticum officinale*

Considered to be an aphrodisiac,<sup>5</sup> but used more for medicinal and culinary applications<sup>6</sup>

### **Mandrake**—*Mandragora spp*

White bryony or English Mandrake had the reputation of being a powerful aphrodisiac and procurer of fertility<sup>7</sup>—but true mandrake, *Mandragora officianalis*, is strongly purgative and blistering--- deadly. This was reputed as a powerful aphrodisiac, especially because the root resembled the phallus. "The roots of mandrake bear a resemblance to the human form. Magically speaking, there are male and female mandrakes. The female

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://herbs-and-spices.net/spice/coriander.htm> and Kowalchik, Claire, ed. Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs, pp 125-127

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.asiachi.com/aboutginseng.html#What%20is%20Ginseng?>

<sup>3</sup> <http://herbs-and-spices.net/spice/galangal.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sacredearth.com/ethnobotany/plantprofiles/henbane.php>

<sup>5</sup> Knab, Sophie Hodorwicz. Polish Herbs, Flowers and Folk Medicine, pp135

<sup>6</sup> Kowalchik, Claire, ed. Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs pp 369-370

<sup>7</sup> Allen, David E.. and Gabrielle Hatfield. Medicinal Plants in Folk Tradition, pp113-114

form, its roots forked and looking like a pair of human legs, is the most sought after. The male, on the other hand, has a single root. It was the female form that was carved in the Middle Ages (in Germany and France) into manikins. It was believed that they brought good luck and wealth.”<sup>8</sup>

**Mugwort—*Artemisia vulgaris***

Used to “restore menstrual flow, ease delivery and cleanse the womb.”<sup>9</sup> Used to increase fertility if collected from nine different fields.<sup>10</sup>

**Myrtle—*Myrica cerifera***

Symbol of love and beauty<sup>11</sup> Sacred to the Goddess Astarte also known as Aphrodite, myrtle has long been associated with love and romance. In Victorian times it was a favourite item in bridal wreaths and in tussie mussies. In the language of flowers myrtle represented love and marriage and love in absence. However a chaplet of myrtle was also worn by brides at their wedding ceremonies to help them avoid being 'with child' too quickly.

**Rose--*Rosa spp***

Sacred to the Goddess of love, Venus to the Romans and Aphrodite to the Greeks, roses in mythology were also symbolic of protection and rebirth.<sup>12</sup> Roses were associated with spring and fertility and different colors indicated specific virtues, i.e. red for passion and desire, white for love and purity.<sup>13</sup>

**Rosemary—*Rosmarinus officianalis***

Symbol of engagements and weddings, worn by the groom and groomsman and incorporated into a wreath worn by the bride and bridesmaids. A rosemary wreath was once used instead of a ring in the wedding ceremony.<sup>14</sup> Also a symbol of remembrance and love, “Tapping a fresh sprig against the finger of a loved one was supposed to secure his or her affection.”<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.emandrake.com/public/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE\\_user\\_op=view\\_page&PAGE\\_id=5&MMN\\_position=3:3](http://www.emandrake.com/public/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE_user_op=view_page&PAGE_id=5&MMN_position=3:3)

<sup>9</sup> Allen, David E.. and Gabrielle Hatfield. Medicinal Plants in Folk Tradition, pp 297-299

<sup>10</sup> Knab, Sophie Hodowicz. Polish Herbs, Flowers and Folk Medicine, pp 139

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.produktorimirtodisardegna.it/code/pagine/id/3/LINGUA/EN> and <http://www.herbsociety.co.uk/hom-myrtle.htm>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.herbsociety.co.uk/hom-rose.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Kowalchik, Claire, ed. Rodale’s Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs, pp 422-427

<sup>14</sup> Knab, Sophie Hodowicz. Polish Herbs, Flowers and Folk Medicine, pp154-155

<sup>15</sup> Kowalchik, Claire, ed. Rodale’s Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs, pp 429

**Rue—*Ruta graveolens***

Rue growing in a garden indicated that a girl of marriageable age lived in the household.<sup>16</sup> Later, rue wreaths exchanged to show “willingness to enter marriage contract,” and the wreath was used instead of a wedding ring.

**Southernwood—*Artemisia abrotanum***

Used to prevent miscarriage, but also “known as the lover’s plant, lad’s love, and maid’s ruin.”<sup>17</sup>

**Thyme--*Thymus spp***

Thyme is said to bring healing or love to those that require it. It is also reputed to bring courage to the heart.<sup>18</sup> It was also used for infertility in animals.<sup>19</sup>

**Tomato—*Lycopersicon esculentum***

This plant became popular in the 16th century, somehow a rumor got started that this food would make a person "more romantic." Records exist of the tomato being used in salads. Soon, use of the fruit expanded to Portugal, France and Italy, where it was embraced and became known as many things--in Northern Europe, the devil's wolf apple; in Italy, the golden apple; and in Spain, the moor's apple. As a result of the continued belief that it could arouse passion, France deemed it a "love apple, " and the Germans, in the 1800s, an "apple of paradise."

The word tomato stems from the French, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, probably translation of French pomme d'amour, from the former belief in the tomato's aphrodisiacal powers, pomme, apple, + de, of, + amour, love. In addition, a translation of the Liebesapfel, means literally, in German, "love apple," and the old Italian word for tomato, "pomi d'amore" means apple of love.

**Vervain or Verbena—*Verbena officianalis***

In his eighth Eclogue, Virgil refers to vervain as a charm to recover lost love. Doubtless this was the verbena, the herba sacra employed in ancient Roman sacrifices, according to Pliny. In his day the bridal wreath was of verbena, gathered by the bride herself. The vervain, or verbena, was employed by brides for centuries as the emblem of chastity.

The Romans used the plant in love potions and for purifying their sacrificial altars (verbena meant “altar plant”). They also used it in prophesying. They called the herb “herba veneris” because they believed it could rekindle dying love. They even held an annual Festival of Verbenalia, dedicated to Venus. If a bride picked Vervain on her wedding day and put it in her bouquet, then her husband would be faithful.

---

<sup>16</sup> Knab, Sophie Hodowicz. Polish Herbs, Flowers and Folk Medicine, pp 19, 156

<sup>17</sup> Kowalchik, Claire, ed. Rodale’s Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs, pp 470

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.herbsociety.co.uk/hom-thyme.htm>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.theherbaltouch.com/iha/thyme.html>

Culpeper indicates that “used with lard it helps pain in the secret parts.”<sup>20</sup>

**Violets**—*Viola odorata*, *tricolor*, etc.

Symbol of fertility and love, they were used in love potions.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Kowalchik, Claire, ed. Rodale’s Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs, pp497

<sup>21</sup>

<http://www.theflowerexpert.com/content/mostpopularflowers/morepopularflowers/violets>