

# The English Cottage Garden Nursery

Cottage Garden Plants, Wildflowers, Herbs, Seeds, Meadow Seed Mixes and Native Hedging

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## VERVAIN (*verbena officinalis*)

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Hardy perennial. Also known as Simpler's Joy and, in Scotland, Dragon's Claw. Bristly stems and spikes of tiny, pale-lilac flowers. Grows 1 – 2 ft (30 – 60 cm) high. Flowers July to October. Name comes from the Celtic "Ferfaen" for Witches' Herb – witches didn't like it. Believed to have grown at Calvary and was used to staunch the flower of Christ's blood, so it was always gathered with the sign of the Cross. As a result of this it was believed to be useful against demons, spells and witches.

Once claimed that Vervain could cure jaundice, gout and piles. And also to heal holes in one's aura! Ancient Egyptians believed Vervain originated from the tears Isis wept for Osiris. Medieval man used Vervain to help rid himself of any spells cast upon him! Believed that if a piece of leaf is inserted into a cut in the hand then, when healed, the owner would be able to open bolts and locks by touch. Can help headache caused by fever if used as an infusion. An infusion also helps mouth ulcers and bad breath. Folklore deemed the plant had to be dug up with a piece of gold or a stag's horn on either 27 June or 25 July!

The Druids used Vervain as an infusion to wash their altars for sacrifices. They harvested the plant with an iron tool when neither sun nor moon was in the sky and when Sirius was rising. Honey was then poured into the ground to replace the plant. 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. Vervain was carried during peace negotiations in ancient Rome – it claimed immunity and the herald carrying the message was called "verbenarius". Sorcerors wore a crown of Vervain when invoking demons. If a bride picked Vervain on her wedding day and put it in her bouquet, then her husband would be faithful. The nineteenth century leech book of Bald and Cilol tells us that Vervain protects against storms and hail.

Placed in a dovecote, Vervain will cause doves to gather. Bury a Vervain leaf in the garden to help other plants thrive. Place it in the bedroom for sweet dreams. It used to be used as a charm for young children to make them happy and love learning. Love potion – flower and seeds of Elecampane, Vervain and Mistletoe berries pounded to a powder and sprinkled into the wine of your chosen love. Vervain used to be sprinkled around dining rooms to make guests merrier. Folklore says that the Devil gave Vervain to men. If enemies share an infusion of the plant, they will become friends. Pigeons like the plant.

In the Fens it was believed to attract eels to where drowned bodies lay. On the Isle of Man, fishermen would take Vervain to sea with them for luck. Mothers would also sew Vervain onto babies' clothes for protect them from fairies. Blacksmiths used to quench iron blades with an infusion of Vervain leaves to give them

magical sharpness.

Found naturally in wasteland and meadows. Attractive to butterflies.

Plant out autumn or spring in full sun or partial shade – slightly chalky or alkaline, well-drained soil is preferred. Pinch out growing tips to encourage bushiness. Removing dead flower spikes will encourage more. If you are going to use the leaves, cut them off in summer before and during flowering. Cut right down in autumn. Plant dies down in winter.

Can be grown indoors in a deep pot.

**CAUTION – DO NOT USE DURING PREGNANCY. EXCESSIVE OR IMPROPER USE CAN LEAD TO VOMITING AND PARALYSIS.**

**\*This sheet is provided for information only and is in no way a prescription for use. Please seek the advice of a qualified herbalist before using\***

[Back to home page](#)