

Elecampane (*Inula helenium*)

Linda Fitchett-Hewitt

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The Forager's Path: School of Botanical Studies

Foundations of Herbal Medicine

Instructor: Mike Masek



Figure 2. Botanical

Name: *Inula*

helenium

Family: Asteraceae

Common Names:

Wild sunflower,

Horseheal,

Yellow starwort,

Elfin root, Elfdock,

Elfwoort,

Horseheal, Horse

elder, Scabwort,

(Eclectic School of

Herbal Medicine,

2015; Gaia Herbs

Inc., 2019).

Folklore: this

plant's species

name, helenium,

derives from Helen

of Troy; elecampane

is said to have

sprung from where

her tears fell as she

was abducted from

Sparta by Prince Paris of Troy. It was sacred to the ancient Celts, and once had the name elfwort and was associated with the elves and fairy folk (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2019).

Cultivation

It is a perennial herb that grows 4 to 5 feet in height and grows well in moist, shady positions, in ordinary garden soil, though it flourishes best in a good, loamy soil, the ground being damp, but fairly well-drained. Ideal conditions are in ones with mild summers and cold winters. Elecampane grows best in part shade but will tolerate full sun. It is easily cultivated. Seeds may be sown, either when ripe, in cold frames, or in spring in the open. It is best propagated, however, by off-sets, taken in the autumn from the old root, with a bud or eye to each. These will take root very readily, and should be planted in rows about a foot asunder, and 9 or 10 inches distant in the rows. In the following spring, the ground should be kept clean from weeds, and if slightly dug in autumn, it will greatly promote the growth of the roots, which will be fit for use after two years' growth. By cutting the root into pieces about 2 inches long, covering with rich, light, sandy soil and keeping in gentle heat during the winter, a good stock of plants can also be obtained.



Harvesting

Harvest the root in the spring or fall season, beginning in the plants' second year or later. Harvest the large taproot, remove outer skin of the root and use root interior.

TCM uses the flowers.

Best Ways to Process

For use in medicine, you wash, peel and chop the roots. It is prepared as a tincture, tea, candy or honey. Flower heads; soak them in honey and fry them.

Best Way to Prepare

To prepare Elecampane as a tea; one half ounce of the fresh root is boiled in a pint of water for a few minutes and left to steep for 15 to 30 minutes. If you use dried root, use half as much as with fresh. 2 to 6 oz, 3 times per day, [Eclectic school of herbal medicine].

As a tincture Fresh root 1:2, Dry root 1:5, 60%, The dosage of tincture is 10-90 drops 3 to 6 times per day [Eclectic school of herbal medicine].

I used the dry root percolation method. The strength is 1:5 weight to volume at 50% alcohol and water as the menstruum.

I used Mountain Rose Elecampane in powdered root form. 600ml final percolation volume + 250ml volume of herb = 850mls menstruum. I mixed the herb and 166ml menstruum and let sit 12 hours then I packed the cone filter and allowed to drip through the funnel at 1 drip per second.

As a syrup: A strong decoction, reduced by half, and add an equal amount of honey. Take 1 – 3 teaspoon 4 times a day.

Candied Elecampane is used for sore throats and harsh coughs. To prepare the root for candy simmer the roots in a syrup made with ½ to 1 cup water and 1 cup sugar to every 2 cups of chopped roots. After roots are softened and clump together, take out and spread flat on baking paper. Store in closed air tight container for up to one month.

Energetics

Stimulating, warming, aromatic remedy that gets things moving

Tastes

It is astringent, bitter and pungent

Therapeutic Uses

1. Deep-seated respiratory infections
2. Persistent, stubborn wet or dry cough

3. Tuberculosis
4. Bronchitis
5. Asthma
6. Fever with chills
7. Stagnant digestion
8. Intestinal parasites
9. GI colic
10. Convalescence and malnutrition
11. Stagnant lymph
12. Homesickness

Context

Inulin is one of the primary constituents of the root. It is a carbohydrate that supports immune function and makes up 45% of the weight of the root. Sterols, resin, pectin, mucilage and essential oils (up to 4% alantolactone, isoalantalactone and azulene) are also found in the root that supports the respiratory tract in a soothing manner while toning the mucous membranes of the G.I. and urinary tracts (Gaia Herbs Inc., 2019).

The acting properties of this herb are as follows: antiseptic, antiviral, antibacterial, anti-amoebic, diaphoretic (inducing perspiration), nutritive, expectorant, demulcent, nutritive, carminative (gas relief), vermifuge (anthelmintic), emmenagogue (increases menses), diuretic, anesthetic, cholagogue (promotes flow of bile) (Eclectic School of Herbal Medicine, 2015).

Warnings: This herb should not be used in pregnant women also, people with extreme allergies to the plants in the family Asteraceae should use caution.

My Interest

I developed an interest in this herb only recently. As our class group walked around the Arboretum this Fall, I was introduced to this beautiful wild sunflower. As a child I had always loved all species of sunflowers and the seeds were a favorite treat of mine. When visiting the Arboretum with my children and grandchildren, one of our favorite gardens was the sunflower garden. I did not recognize *Inula helenium* as a sunflower until I asked and then found that it was in the **Asteraceae** family and looked similar the genus of **Helianthus**. I.E. the name Wild Sunflower.

After researching this plant, the last couple of months, I have decided this is an herb I will always have on hand. In my opinion, it is a miracle herb. Its uses are amazingly varied and yet it is quite easy to prepare and use.

Unfortunately, I have had many incidents of respiratory illnesses in my family over the years and I am far too familiar with inhalers, antibiotics, hospitalizations, etcetera to be very comfortable during the winter months or the high allergy seasons. After researching this herb, I purchased the finely ground root for the winter. I was very grateful I had purchased this herb as my daughter caught the flu and came down with walking pneumonia this past month. My daughter is unable to take any antibiotics and refused to go to the doctor for treatment. I made a strong tea for her and within three days of drinking a cup several time a day, sleeping, and drinking all the fluids she could, her symptoms, and horrendous cough were eliminated.

I will admit the taste is very bitter (cooling) but when combined with apples and honey in the tea, it is palatable. The pungency (warming) of the herb is another hurdle for some to overcome but this can be good to warm up the digestive fire and will help break up the mucus that is so common with respiratory illnesses. This herb is perfect for congestion as it stimulates the flow of the mucus and helps it to be expelled from the lungs.

I am convinced this herb came to me as a helpmate I have always needed and would have used this had I known of its healing properties. I will also use this on my animals as it has been used in ancient times as a healer for animals. In past it was used for respiratory and skin issues with both horses and sheep. I am looking for preparatory information at this time to help them through the winter if needed.

I feel very fortunate to have been introduced to this plant and will use it wisely.

Elecampane Root Cough Syrup

Cough syrup recipe:

¼ cup dried elecampane root (25 grams)

¼ cup dried and chopped rose hips (35 grams)

1 pint water

½ to 1 cup raw honey

Simmer root, rose hips and water for 25 minutes, covered. Strain off herbs.

Measure the liquid and add equal amount of honey.

Store in refrigerator and it should last a long time.

Adults 1 tsp. every 30 minutes for congested coughs and sore throats.

Rosemary Gladstar Cough Formula

Rosemary Gladstar: Formula for Lung and Chest Congestion

This formula can be made into a tea, syrup, or tincture.

If tea add more licorice, cinnamon and ginger to the formula.

Combine dried herbs: 2 parts licorice roots, 1-part cinnamon, 1-part echinacea, 1-part marshmallow, 1-part elecampane and 1/4-part ginger. Store in airtight container and use to make tea or tincture.

REFERENCES

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