

MEMÓRIA DA TERRA

~ Cycles of study with Native Plants and Ancient Wisdom ~

ST. JOHN'S WORT

(*Hipericum perforatum*)



Family: Hypericaceae

Origin: Europe, West and Central Asia and some parts of North Africa.
Grows abundantly in North America.

Element and Planet: Fire/Air. Sun.

Actions: Anti-depressant, Nervine, Vulnerary (wound healing).

Energetics: Warming, Drying.

Medicinal Properties and Uses: One of the constituents of St John's wort is hypericin, responsible for the red pigmentation of the flowers and with strong antidepressant and antiviral properties. Therefore, the most common use of this herb is in the treatment of depression, anxiety, restlessness, insomnia, nervous burnout and other symptoms caused by unbalance of the nervous system.

As a tonic for the nervous system and liver, has a diuretic action, clearing toxins from the body. It is used to treat nervous ulcers and gastric diseases such as gastroenteritis, dysentery and diarrhea.

Can be used for incontinence, due to its astringent action on the urinary tract.

St John's wort enhances the vitality of the body and is one of the remedies used for hormonal alterations caused by menopause and menstrual cramping and mood symptoms of PMS (premenstrual tension).

Topically, this plant has great power in the treatment of cuts, bruises, burns, sunburns, muscle pain, neuralgia, hemorrhoids and other wounds. It's recommended either internally or externally, to treat shingles (herpes zoster).

Finally, Hypericum can be used to clear chest congestion and phlegm, as it is an effective expectorant.

Warning: This plant interacts with many pharmaceutical medications. Should not be taken by people on SSRI's and other serotonin inducers. It reduces the effect of most chemical medications, so shouldn't be taken along with other treatments, including contraceptive pills.

For people with sensitive skin, might cause a reaction, as it's photosensitive.

Should not be taken during pregnancy.

Identification, Habitat and Ecology: St John's Wort is a perennial plant, with an erect stem and small, opposite and oval shaped leaves. With five petals and five sepals, has bright yellow flowers with large stamens. The name perforatum comes from the many translucent dots on the flowers and leaves, seen against the light, that are little glands filled with highly medicinal oils.

This herb likes well drained soils and sunny places, growing in grasslands, meadows, prairies and open woods, as well as disturbed land, like roadside verges, railway embankments and logged forest areas.

St John's Wort adapts well to poor soils and rocky areas, due to its deep rhizomes. It is important for a number of pollinators, as bees and some butterflies. Spreads easily and grows in many areas of the world. Can be considered invasive in some areas where is not native and outcompetes native species, as in North America and Australia.

History and Cultural Uses: Around the Summer Solstice and St. John's day (24th of June) this plant was traditionally harvested (thus the name St. John's Wort), because the healing properties are more active in this time of the year. Great fires were lit to celebrate the Solstice portal and people

would dance around the fire with St. John's Wort crowns on their heads, throwing them to the roofs or the fire afterwards, to ensure abundant harvests and protect the cattle from spells.

This herb is considered a protector against physical, psychological and spiritual illness and was commonly hung over doors.

Medieval warriors couldn't go to the battlefield if they brought with them Hypericum, because it was considered a disloyal advantage.

The history of use of this plant dates to 1 A.D. in Greece, but in the 16th century Paracelsus brought a new attention to its medicinal use.

In modern times, St John's Wort became globalized with scientific validation as a remedy to treat mild to moderate depression.

Folklore and Mythology: One of the names used in European folklore for St John's Wort is Devil's flight, alluding to its common use to ward off evil spirits and evil eye. It's one of the most important plants in folk magic, symbolizing the light of the sun, renewal and healing.

It's bright yellow flowers are associated with the Sun, thus being connected to solar deities as Helios in the Greek mythology and Baldur in the Norse mythology.

The red colouration of the buds and flowers when crushed was referred to as the blood of St John the Baptist, when he was beheaded. It was said that a Hypericum plant grew from the blood.

Before that, the Celts associated this herb with the the Green Man, the Summer King and deeply revered it as the guardian of the Midsummer celebration.