

~ Ask Granny Earth ~

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Coltsfoot

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There's a little yellow flower that is blooming now along country roads in this area. There are no leaves, and the flowers resemble a dandelion. Do you know what it is?

Yes , I do know what that yellow flower is. When I moved into my present home two years ago, it was growing all along the front porch. I didn't know what it was then, but the next year my friend Wes Lindner, 'the Yule Gibbons of Markleysburg', told me that it was Coltsfoot. Once you identify it, you'll never forget it, and you'll see it growing this time of year as a road-side herb, and in waste areas in poor soil. Some of its other common names are: Hallfoot, Horsehoof, Foalswort, Bullsfoot and Donnhove.

COLTSFOOT (*Tussilago farfara*): The name Coltsfoot describes the shape of the leaf. *Tussilago* is Latin (*tussis*) for 'cough' and refers to the antitussive effects of this herb.

Coltsfoot is a robust, creeping perennial with large heart-shaped/hof-shaped, toothed leaves (about 4 inches across), which have a cobweb-like covering. Before the introduction of matches, this felty covering was rubbed off, wrapped in a rag dipped in a solution of saltpeter and dried in the sun, to be used later as tinder (an easily flammable material).

In early spring, dandelion-like flowers appear on woolly stalks (before the leaves sprout), usually in late February or early March. The flowers and the leaves need to be collected separately, because by the time the leaves appear, the flowers have gone to seed. The seeds are crowned with a tuft of silky hairs, which are used by Goldfinches to line their nests. Isn't Nature wonderful?

Collect the flowers in March, and the leaves in June and July. The flower will need to be dried on a screen in a dry airy place, because when you pick them, you pluck the flower from the stem.

Coltsfoot is a bittersweet, astringent, and expectorant herb with licorice-like flavor. It relaxes spasms, controls coughing, soothes irritated tissues, reduces inflammation and stimulates the immune system. It is known mainly for its internal medicinal qualities in the healing of whooping cough, asthma, bronchitis and laryngitis. It can be used externally for ulcers, sores, eczema, insect bites and for all skin inflammations.

A decoction, or tea is made of 1 ounce of herb to 1 quart of water. For the decoction, boil this mixture down to a pint, sweeten with honey and take in ½ cupfuls frequently. This remedy is good for colds, asthma or scrofula (tuberculosis of the lymphatic glands). For the tea, simmer for 10 – 15 minutes. The decoction and the tea serve the same purpose, with the decoction being stronger, and for more serious, acute conditions.

Old-time herbalists - Dioscorides, Galen, and Pliny considered Coltsfoot to be Nature's best herb for the lungs. They recommended smoking it for the healing of coughs. The leaves are the basis of the British Herb Tobacco, in which Coltsfoot predominates. The other ingredients are Buckbean, Eyebright, Betony, Rosemary, Thyme, Lavender and Chamomile flowers. Those suffering from asthma, catarrh, and other lung troubles derive much benefit from smoking this Herbal Tobacco, the use of which does not entail any of the injurious effects of ordinary tobacco.

For two years Coltsfoot has grown all along my front porch. This year I looked forward to seeing it again, but it's GONE! As I drive around, I see it growing everywhere. But, it has decided to leave here, and I am so disappointed.