

~ Ask Granny Earth ~

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Night Blooming Cereus

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Have you ever heard of a "Night-Blooming Cereus" plant? I have one and it recently bloomed for me. I was wondering if it has any medicinal value?

I have not only heard of this wonderful plant, but I also have one and it also bloomed just last week - a sight to behold! I was making preparations to bring the last remaining plants 'home' from the old house in Donegal, when I noticed that 'Night Bloomer' had two huge flower buds on it. Now this was a real thrill for me, because I had this plant for five years and this would be the first time it ever bloomed for me. I was so excited! I called several close friends to share my joy and we made plans to meet that evening for the opening. Right on schedule, around 9:00 she began her once a year production. By 10:00 she was totally open and the aroma filled the night air. Ooh's and awe's and lots of camera clicks...there she was, in full bloom; spectacular floral fireworks display!

Night Blooming Cerus (*Selenicereus grandiflorus*): The name is said to mean "transient beauty" and grandiflorus, which of course, would mean

'grand flower'. Other common names are Large-flowering Cactus and Sweet-scented Cactus. This plant is definitely tropical where it blooms at night in the jungles of Mexico and Central America, filling the air with a potent, vanilla aroma. By the next morning this huge flower (5 – 8 inches across) has closed up and its show is finished.

If you are lucky enough to have a Night Bloomer, you can expect it to bloom in its 4th or 5th year. The leaves of the plant are not especially attractive. You might even say that they're ugly, but the flower definitely makes up for this lack of beauty.

Night Blooming Cereus is relatively easy to grow. They are members of the Cactus family and (it is said that they) need a fast-draining soil; one's that formulated for cactus is ideal, or regular dirt with some sand added will suffice. I personally have found that they are not that particular and need no special soil. My Night Bloomers have survived many adverse condition such as over watering, forgetting to water, lack of light, too much light, etc. So I would say that they are easy to grow, providing that you remember to bring them in before Winter strikes.

They are easy to propagate too; take a snip of a leaf or stem, stick it into dirt and water- that's it! In no time at all, it will take root and you'll have another Night Bloomer.

The specific healing field for Night Blooming Cereus and other Cactus is diseases of the heart. It is considered to possess medicinal properties that are valuable as a functional remedy to increase cardiac nutrition. Its influence is upon the entire sympathetic nervous system and in regulating the action of the heart and circulation. It is considered a remedy for most functional cardiac irregularities, such as palpitation, pain, cardiac dyspnea and rhythm. It does not seem to make any difference whether the heart action is feeble, violent, or irregular, because it promotes normal rhythmic action of the cardiac muscle.

Dr. Harvey Felter says that in spasms of the heart muscle and in cardiac pain it is the most prompt of all cardiac remedies (*The Eclectic Materia Medica, Pharmacology and Therapeutics*). He goes on to say that, "When the heart is enfeebled from long illness, or in incurable conditions of the heart, it (Night Blooming Cereus' **Cactine* properties) seldom fails to give some relief."

Night Booming Cereus contains alkaloids (including **cactine*) and flavonoids (isorhamnetin). Its cardiotonic effect is considered similar to that of cardiac glycosides (including digoxin, gigitoxin and lanatosides) which are found in Foxglove (Latin name: *Digitalis purpurea*).

In all potent medicinal herbal remedies, one should take only under professional supervision. As in the case of Night Blooming Cereus, excessive doses may cause stomach upset and/or hallucinations.