

Burdock

Arctium minus and *Arctium Lappa*

Bardane



Burdock, an important ingredient in a cancer remedy, is in great demand.

Properties and Uses

Burdock is mainly known for its medicinal properties, but is also used in cosmetics and household products and in food. Both the common and great burdock seem to have the same medicinal properties, so they will be dealt with together in this fact sheet.

Medicinal

Burdock (*A. Lappa*) roots are used in the making of Essiac, a product reputed to be effective against cancer (Flor-Essence, marketed by Flora Inc., is a similar product). Burdock is also a sudorific and helps relieve rheumatoid pain, chronic skin conditions (acne, eczema, boils, etc.) and scalp problems. There are even claims that it can prevent hair loss by invigorating the scalp. Antiseptic and antimicrobial, it purifies the blood, regulates digestion and helps treat respiratory infections. It is also said to have hypoglycemic, diuretic and detoxifying effects.

According to Iteipmai,¹ the root has traditionally been used to treat moderate acne (oral or topical application), and to help the body's elimination functions. The leaves are used to soothe itchy skin, insect bites and cracked, scratched or chapped skin.

Culinary

The root, when dried and roasted, is used as a coffee substitute. A type of beer that reputedly purifies the blood can also be made out of it.

¹ Institut technique interprofessionnel des plantes à parfum, médicinales et aromatiques (iteipmai), a French research institute for the development of perfume, medicinal and aromatic plants.

Roots from first-year plants are edible and can be dried for winter use.

Burdock floral stem hearts can be eaten raw or boiled twice (to eliminate bitterness) when the stems are harvested before flowering and after all the surrounding fibres have been removed. The plant is rich in iron and vitamin C.

Other Uses

Burdock is used for skin baths, as it is known as a tonic with soothing effects.

Ashes from the plant harvested while in bloom will produce a high-potassium fertilizer.

Habitat

Common burdock (*Arctium minus*) is much more widespread than great burdock (*Arctium Lappa*). Common burdock is frequently found on moist, fertile soil, particularly in vacant lots, pastures, former stream beds or on the edge of forests. Great burdock is found in similar habitats, as well as along streams.

Market

Industrial Demand

The demand for burdock is quite hard to evaluate. According to several sources, a producer cultivating a Japanese variety of burdock in the Montérégie area currently holds the major part of the burdock market in Quebec.

The main demand for burdock in Canada comes from such processing companies as Essiac and Flor-Essence. Several herbal stores also buy burdock, especially certified organic crops. Demand is increasing by approximately 15% annually. A herbal store owner in Val-David reports buying approximately 175 kg of dried burdock roots yearly. In 2003, certified organic burdock roots sold for \$8.25 per kg.

Harvesting Method

Burdock is a biennial plant, meaning that it grows for two years and then dies. In the first year, the leaves are harvested in the summer and roots in the fall. In the second year, the flowers are harvested at the end of the summer. Seeds can be harvested either during the first or second year.

Harvesting the root is a problem since it grows very deep underground. Some harvesters use specialized machines.

Product Quality

To preserve stems and leaves properly, they have to be dried in the open air, in a specially designed dryer. Roots, seeds and flowers are dried on a trellis. The leaf, root and seed drying process can be accelerated by placing them in a low oven, between 95°F and 120°F (35°C and 50°C).

The fibrous part of the stems has to be removed so they can be cut into pieces.

Once completely dried, all plant parts must be kept in an airtight container and away from the light.

Contacts and Buyers

In the Gaspé Peninsula, the market is still marginal. Natural food stores sell very little burdock and most of the time, it is necessary to turn to markets outside the region. The best bet is to inquire at natural food stores. In other parts of Quebec, several herbalists and organizations sell medicinal plants. There is also a network of organic medicinal plants in Rock Forest (near Sherbrooke), which can be reached at (819) 847-2676.

Domestication

Burdock reproduces easily by means of seedlings or root division. It is planted in full sunlight or in partly shaded

areas. It prefers deep loose soils that are rich in humus and with a pH level of 6 to 8.

It takes approximately 10 weeks for a seed to become a marketable plant. To use the root as a vegetable, first-year roots have to be harvested while they are still young and tender, i.e. between three and five months. For dry roots, two-year roots have to be harvested in the fall.

In the Gaspé Peninsula, a few herbalists cultivate burdock for their own needs in relatively modest amounts. Wild harvesting is also carried out in the region. Elsewhere in Quebec, at least one producer cultivates burdock on a commercial scale, but it is a Japanese variety (Gobo). Information on cultivation methods is very limited

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Web Sites

LE RÉSEAU PROTÉUS. Portail santé de médecine
intégrée: www.reseauproteus.net

RICHTERS HERB SPECIALISTS:
www.richters.com

HISTORICAL INFORMATION ON ESSIAC:
<http://www.essiacinfo.org>

ESSIAC PRODUCTS: www.essiac-resperin.com

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