PLANT FACT SHEET

Use with caution

This plant can be harmful if it is eaten raw, in large amounts or without the right preparation. Read the whole fact sheet before use.

Symphytum officinale L.

GENUS *Symphytum* **FAMILY** Boraginaceae

COMMON NAMES Common Comfrey, Knit-bones

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Leaves - tea, Herbs, Vegetable, Flowers, Roots - coffee

The young leaves are cooked and eaten. They are also chopped and added to salads. They can be used in soups and fritters. The mature leaves are used to flavour cakes.
The blanched stalks are used like asparagus.
The peeled roots are cut and used in soups. Dried leaves and roots are used for tea. The roasted roots are mixed with chicory and dandelion to make coffee.
The flowers are sucked for their nectar.
CAUTION In some countries caution has been stressed (and bans imposed) about this plant because of toxic alkaloids in similar plants. These are pyrrolizidine alklaloids but probably have to be eaten in large amounts before they damaged the liver. The older leaves are bitter and should be avoided.

DESCRIPTION

A low clumpy plant with large long rough leaves. A dense crown of leaves and shoots develops. Plants are 30-90 cm tall. Leaves are 30-60 cm long and 10-20 cm wide. Lower leaves have leaf stalks and are branched. The inner leaves do not have leaf stalks. The flower stalk has many flowers. The flowers are purple, red or yellowish white. The nutlets are black, oval, 3-4 mm across and smooth an shiny.

HABITAT

It is a temperate plant. It grows satisfactorily from sea level up to at least 2200 m altitude in the tropics. It will grow in very poor soil. In Argentina it grows below 500 m above sea level. It suits hardiness zones 3-9. In Hobart Botanical gardens.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It is grown by breaking up the clump and re-planting a portion of it.

NOTES

The number of chromosomes varies considerably. There are about 25 Symphytum species.
Wild comfrey has pyrrolizidine alkaloid and the cancer causing chemical symphytine.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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