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Subject: First Aid Kit in a Plant

Steven Horne's Newsletter

Natural News and Herbal Views

First Aid Kit in a Plant

Plantain helps heal burns, cuts, bites, stings, and other injuries

Most of the students I've had over the years use herbal products that have been commercially manufactured. If you're one of those people, there is one plant you ought to know how to identify and use because you won't find a better plant for minor injuries, snake and insect bites, and bee stings. I'm talking about plantain.



Like dandelions and other medicinal weeds, plantain is not native to North America. It was brought here by the European settlers and spread across the land as they spread, a fact that suggests we really need this herb. There are two common species you should learn to recognize. The first, broad-leaf plantain (*Plantago major*), is pictured on the left and the second, narrow leaf plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*, is pictured below). Both are common lawn and garden weeds. Here are some of the amazing uses for these plants.

Bee Stings

I learned about plantain as a remedy for bee stings in Edward Shook's *Advanced Treatise in Herbology*. He tells of a woman who came to him in great distress. She had only one arm. Some years before she had been stung by a bee and her arm had swollen severely. The doctor had lanced and drained it of pus, but it continued to grow worse and was eventually amputated. Now, she had a bee sting on her



remaining hand and was in despair, fearing that she would now lose her other arm. Dr. Shook harvested some plantain leaves from his yard and instructed the lady to crush them and apply them as a poultice. The next day the hand was entirely well.

Some years ago, a neighbor came over. He had a son who had been stung by a bee on his forearm, which had become severely swollen. The swelling was moving to his upper arm and he told me he was thinking of taking the boy to the emergency room, but had heard I was an herbalist and wanted to know if I knew something that could be done.

I gathered some plantain leaves from my lawn (which I did not treat with weed-killers) and crushed the leaves. I had him apply the crushed leaves over the area where the boy had been stung. I told him, "If the swelling doesn't go down in the next 15 minutes, take him to the emergency room." Fifteen minutes later there was no sign of swelling. So, I can testify as to the effectiveness of plantain on bee stings.

Snakebite

I've never had to treat a bite from a poisonous snake. But if I ever did, plantain is one of the herbs I'd want to use. The reason I'd consider plantain is because of what I've read about the mongoose in India. The mongoose fights and kills large venomous snakes, such as the cobra. It has been reported that if the mongoose is bitten, he dashes into the jungle, finds plantain, eats it and rubs the juices in the wound. He then returns to kill the snake.

Of course, I would apply the crushed, fresh plantain leaves on the way to the emergency room, but if you're out hiking in the wilds that might take a while. And taking the time to apply what is available might make sure you make it to the emergency room at all. In the absence of plantain, I'd use the leaves of any good astringent plant that happened to be nearby.

A Drawing Agent

I remember attending one of my favorite herbalists, Matthew Wood, where he spoke in detail about the uses of plantain. He indicated that plantain was a drawing agent, which could pull morbid material out of the body. He told



many stories about this, but one, in particular, stuck with me.

A man got into an accident riding a motorcycle. He skidded on the gravel and badly mangled the skin on his leg. Little bits of dirt and gravel were embedded in the skin of his leg. In the emergency room, they removed many of the larger pieces, but there were many more small pieces that could not be easily removed.

When the man returned home, they treated his leg by juicing fresh plantain leaves and mixing the juice with instant potato flakes to make a poultice. They applied this to the leg and it pulled all the small pieces of dirt and grit out of the wounds and helped them heal quickly.

Matthew also indicated that he had used the crushed leaves of fresh plantain as a poultice after dental surgery to draw out a small piece of a tooth that had not been extracted when the dentist pulled the tooth. He told several stories about how plantain can pull the infection at the base of old root canals and ease pain and swelling after dental surgery.

Burns

In the early 1980s, when I was first getting started in herbal medicine, I attended a workshop held by a group of Utah midwives. A couple of ladies shared their experiences in healing third-degree burns. They had successfully treated third-degree burns, healing them without scarring. The first thing they applied to the burns was an oil of plantain, which they claimed took the pain out of severe burns in minutes. This was followed by alternating a poultice made of fresh comfrey leaves that had been crushed to a pulp and mixed with honey with a poultice of freshly grated carrots. (They may have used some other plants in their poultices, but those are the two I remember.)



The plantain oil was made by putting plantain leaves in olive oil and heating the oil to about 100 degrees Fahrenheit in a stainless steel or enamel container for 24 to 48 hours. This can be done in a warm oven with the door propped open or using a slow cooker set on low. When the leaves became crispy, the oil was then strained and bottled. It can be hardened into a salve using a little beeswax, and is one of the three ingredients in my favorite salve recipe, which also includes comfrey and calendula.

Other Topical Uses

Besides the above uses, fresh plantain leaves can be crushed and applied as a poultice for running sores, itching skin, ringworm, mastitis, bruises, eczema, boils, carbuncles, poison oak and poison ivy, and even tumors. It is a common ingredient in both healing and soothing salves, and in drawing or escharotic salves used for moles or skin cancer.

Dried plantain does not work as well as fresh plantain. You can make a tincture out of the fresh leaves in the same way as I make the tincture of [wild lettuce](#). You put the fresh leaves in the blender (a powerful one like my VitaMix works best) or juice them. You add enough glycerin and/or alcohol to preserve the liquid. (See *Modern Herbal Dispensatory* for more detailed directions.)

The tincture of fresh plantain can be applied to a cotton ball and used as a compress for insect bites and stings. Because it is too hot and dry for plantain to grow in my yard where I currently live, I've used this tincture for both a scorpion sting and a nasty ant bite with positive effects.

Using Plantain Internally

The tincture of fresh plantain is also helpful for drawing deep congestion out of the lungs. For that application, I combine it with grindelia or gumweed. This duo helps loosen congestion deep in the lungs.

Internally, plantain helps heal leaky gut and intestinal inflammation. It can also be applied topically for hemorrhoids.

Although the seeds of the plantain species found in North America are not harvested commercially like the plantain species in India from which psyllium is derived, they do have the same mucilaginous properties and could be harvested on a small scale as a bulk laxative. Plantain leaves can also be harvested and used for salad greens or eaten as a steamed vegetable.

So, if you're not familiar with this plant, start looking around for it this summer, so you'll recognize it when you see it. That way, when injuries or stings occur you can look around and make use of this wonderful first aid herb.



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