

## Comfrey the first aid herb

Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) has long been known for its impressive ability to heal wounds. Its properties are due to the presence of allantoin, a chemical that stimulates cell division.

Comfrey has many healing properties. It is the allantoin that gives comfrey its reputation for healing wounds, broken bones, burns, sprains, sore joints, dry skin and for reducing the swelling associated with fractures. Fresh, clean comfrey leaves can be used in a poultice to treat these injuries. Comfrey ointment is now also available from health food store and many supermarkets.

One of the old-fashioned country names for comfrey is 'knitbone' and in the days before plaster casts, comfrey root was prepared and placed over an injury in a compress, where it would provide valuable support. The flowering tops of comfrey contain vitamin B12 and the plant also contains calcium, potassium and phosphorus. Traditionally, young leaves were eaten as vegetables, either raw or steamed like spinach. However, the internal use of comfrey is not recommended as liver damage may occur from continual ingestion. Topical use though is safe as the alkaloids it contains will not penetrate the skin.

Comfrey ointment is the basic herbal treatment for all sorts of burns, from minor burns and blistered sunburns to third degree burns. It prevents scarring by its cell proliferant action.

The ointment is also safe to use on post-operative scars, but only if there is no risk of infection.

However, as comfrey ointment is not an antiseptic, it is best to dress post-operative wounds with an antiseptic first.

To prevent and treat scar tissue and promote rapid healing.

*1 handful freshly chopped comfrey leaf*

*1 handful calendula petals*

*1 handful freshly chopped comfrey root*

*15 g beeswax*

*20 ml herbal infusion*

*20 ml comfrey root goo*

*65 ml almond oil*

*6 drops tincture benzoin*

Put the comfrey leaf and calendula petal in a ceramic bowl, add 300 ml of boiling water, cover and infuse until cold. Strain through clean muslin and add the required quantity of herbal infusion to the recipe.

Put the chopped comfrey root in an enamel or stainless steel saucepan and cover with water. Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer until a cream has formed. Cook for a few minutes longer, remove from heat and mash the roots thoroughly to make the goo. Strain through muslin cloth and add the required quantity of comfrey root goo to the recipe.

In a double pan, melt the beeswax over a medium heat until completely liquid. Warm the almond oil and add it, the herbal infusion, and comfrey goo to the melted wax. Stir until well blended, remove from heat and add tincture benzoin. Beat with a wooden spoon or electric mixer until cool and of a creamy texture. Store in a tightly capped, sterilised, amber-coloured glass jar.

### **Comfrey Fertiliser**

With its high levels of potash, comfrey tea can be used as an excellent fertiliser for tomato, pepper, cucumber and potato plants. The smell while it is "cooking" is strong. Pick a good-sized handful of leaves. Place them in a container with enough water to cover the leaves. Cover and let this cook for 4 weeks in cool weather or 2 weeks in hot weather. Then squeeze the leaves to extract as much juice as possible. Strain and use at a rate of 1/3 cup of comfrey juice to 5 litres of water. Use as a foliar feed and soil drench around the plants. Put the solid wastes into the compost pile.