

Common Name: **Cowslip**

Genus: *Primula*

Species: *veris*

Family: Primulaceae

AKA: Herb Peter, Paigle. Peggle. Key Flower. Key of Heaven. Fairy Cups. Patty Mulleins. Crewel. Buckles. Palswort. Plumrocks. Mayglower. Password. Areytke. Drelip. Our Lady's Keys. Arthritica. Anglo-saxon: Cuy lippe, Greek: Paralysis



Historical Uses:

Medical: : “The plant is healing for ailments of the limbs, [and is good for headache and catarrh. Its oil rejuvenates the elderly suffering the pains and cold of wintertime, and is useful in restoring speech and other faculties to those paralyzed by apoplexy; in such cases it is either given in drink or dropped into one or both ears.”(1)

“The Cowslips are commended against the paine of the joints called the Gout, and slackness of the sinews, which is the palsie. The decoction of the roots is thought to be profitably given against the stone in the kidneys and bladder; and the juice of the leaves for members that are loose and out of joint, or inward parts that are hurt, rent, or broken... [a powder of the roots] drincken in Ale and purgeth by vomit very forcibly (but safely) waterish humours, choler... a conserve made with the flowers of Cowslips and sugar prevaileth wonderfully against the palsie, convulsions, cramps, and all the diseases of the sinews.” (2)

“The distilled water from the leaves and flowers of the cowslip ‘is good against the pain in the head coming of cold, biting of mad dogs, and ‘for women that beareth child’. Also, the face often washed therewith withdraweth the spots and pimples in the face and causeth the skin go be fair.” (3)

When melancholy rises up in a person, it makes the person sad and turbulent in his or her moods. It makes them pour forth words against God. Airy spirits see this, rush to the person, and through persuasion many times turn them towards insanity. Let the person place this herb on the flesh, near the heart, until it warms them up. The airy spirits who wear the person out will cease to torment them because they dread the strength that this herb takes from the sun.(4)



Culinary: Used in salads, stuffings, and Cowslip Wine. (5)

Folklore/Astrology: It is ruled by Venus. “It had a magical value for the complexion, and was the emblem of the Norse goddess Freya since its blossoms resembled the bunched keys she used to unlock the treasures of her palace. In Christian times it became known as St. Peter’s keys or Our Lady’s keys. The plant also conceals fairies with its flowers.” (6)



Wild Cowslip on the Burren in Ireland

Primrose is warm and has all its greenness from the sharpness of the sun. Certain herbs are strengthened mainly by the sun, certain others by the moon, and certain others from the moon and sun together. But this herb takes its powers mainly from the strength of the sun and hence checks melancholy.(7)

Other: Cowslip was often called ‘herba paralysis’ because it was believed to be good for palsy, gout, and people who HAVE epilepsy. (8)

Contemporary Uses:

Parts Used: Roots and flowers

Medicinal: “Used internally for bronchitis, mucus, dry cough, whooping cough, asthma, arthritis, insomnia, headache, and restlessness (especially in children). Not given during pregnancy, or to patients sensitive to aspirin or taking anti-coagulant drugs. Used externally for

facial neuralgia, arthritic pain, skin blemishes, sunburn, and migraine.” (9)

Culinary: Young leaves and flowers are used in salads. Flowers are also used to make wines and tea. (8)

Area of Origin: Central and Southeastern Europe through Asia Minor

Physical description: Develops its leaves in early spring, at first just two tight coils rolled backward and laying side by side. These leaves then unroll. They look similar to leaves of Primrose but shorter and rounder. Leaves are ovate-oblong, about 2-8 inches long. All the leaves lay flat on the ground like a rosette. An umbel of flowers is borne atop a long stalk rising from the center of the leaves. Short, stout rhizome with long, thin roots.

Plant Type: Perennial

Height: 6-8 inches

Flower Color: Deep yellow with orange marks and cylindrical pale green calyces

Flowering Period: Spring

Soil Type/ Requirements: Dry

Soil pH: neutral to alkaline

Sun Requirements: Sun or partial shade

Hardiness Zone: Z 5-9

Propagation: Sow by seed in late summer (species only). Divide in late spring or early autumn.

Sources

1. Anderson, pg. 249
2. Gerard, pg. 779-883
3. Freeman, pg. 12
4. Von Bingen, pg. 172
5. Anderson, pg. 249
6. Ibid
7. Von Bingen, pg. 172
8. Freeman, pg. 12
9. Bown, pg. 330
10. Ibid

Illustrations/Images:

1. Fuchs Herbal 1543
2. Ireland 2012