

Common Name: **Deadly Nightshade**

Genus: *Atropa*

Species: *belladonna*

Family: Solanaceae

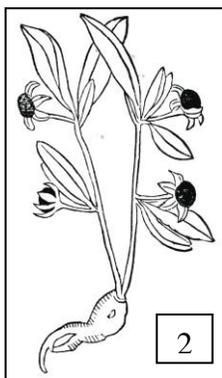
AKA: Devils Cherries, Devil's Herb, Great Morel, Naughty Man's Cherries, Divale, Black Cherry, Dwayberry, Sleeping Nightshade, Belladonna

Historical Uses:



“The generic name of the plant “Atropa” comes from the Greek “Atropas” who is one of the Fates that cut the thread of human life, perhaps referring to the deadly nature of the plant.” (1)

Medical: “This kinde of nightshade causeth sleep, troubleth the mind, bringeth madnesse if a few of the berries be inwardly taken, but if more be given they also kill and bring present death. *Theophrastus* in his 6. Book doth likewise write of Mandrake in this manner. The greene leaves of deadly nightshade may with great aduice be used in such cases at Pettimorell: but if you will follow my counsel, deale not with the same in any case; and banish it from your gardens. The leaves hereof laid unto the temples cause sleepe, especially if they be imbibed or moistened in wine vinegar. It easeth the intolerable paines of the headache proceeding of heate in furious agues, causing rest being applied as aforesaid.”(2)



“Reference to this plant indicates that it was used medicinally to sedate users prior to operations, to stop pain, and to dilate the pupil to facilitate an eye examination. It was also used as a diuretic, as an anti-spasmodic and to relive angina pectoris (chest pain due to coronary heart disease).” (3)

Other: The juice of the plant was applied by women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to the skin near the eye or in the eye to cause the pupil to dilate, thus giving them large pupils and the eye a bright, glistening appearance. At the time this was thought to be a sign of feminine beauty.

Folklore/Astrology: “Cold and moist in the second degree, but Gerard terms it cold in the fourth. Scots gave it in beer to the Danes during a truce, later killing them when it took effect. “(4) “This plant was known as a witches’ plant; the name Belladonna is said

to refer to the fact that the plant can sometimes take on the form of an enchantress who is beautiful to behold, but dangerous to look upon. Another explanation for the name may be that this plant was part of an infusion that ancient Roman priests would drink before they worshiped or called on Bellona, the Goddess of War. Folklore relates that the Devil is said to tend and trim the plant except on Walpurgis, when he is off preparing for the witches' Sabbath. The plant was supposedly used in spells for madness and death and conferred second sight to the user. If worn as a wreath, it kept people safe from evil spells, cattle from evil enchantments, and horses from being hagridden.” (5)

Additional Historical Facts: Allegedly given by the Scots under King Duncan I to an invading army of Danes (CE 1035 +/-) mixed in wine to sedate them after which they were murdered. This is also supposedly the plant that poisoned the troops of Marcus Antonius during the Parthian wars.(6)

Contemporary Uses:

Contemporary Uses: Cultivated widely for use in the pharmaceutical industry for the alkaloids the plant contains. It is a narcotic herb that relieves spasms and reduces secretions of the mouth, bronchi and stomach. Internally, it has been used for asthma, kidney and gall stones, Parkinson's disease, myocardial infarction, hypertension, hyperacidity, gastric ulcers, colic, motion sickness, and as a premedication before surgery. (7)

Cautions: Every part of this plant is poisonous and can be deadly, due to the presence of the alkaloid Atropine. The roots are the most poisonous part of the plant followed by the leaves, flowers and lastly the berries(Encarta, 2001). The berries are the size of small cherries and in an immature state are green. When they ripen they turn a deep, dark purple. Caution should be taken in handling this plant, gloves are recommended. (8)

Area of Origin: Central and South Europe to Africa and Asia.

Physical description: Root is thick, leaves dull, and darkish green with purple flower and berries.

Plant type: Perennial

Form: Upright with erect branched stems.

Height: Tall in shady places, shorter in sunny locations, 60-150 cm. (2-5 ft.)

Flower color: Purplish-brown bell shaded flowers. About 2.5cm (1 in.) in size.



Belladonna plant with flowers in bloom



Belladonna berries-
Green (immature)
Dark Purple (mature)

Flowering period: June and July

Soil type: Naturally found on wooded hills, in chalk or limestone soils.

Soil requirements: requires moist soil

Ph: Can stand a wide range of pH

Fruit: Dark purplish-black berries, 1-2cm. (1/2-3/4 in.)

Hardiness zone: 6-9

Sun requirements: It can grow in any light but prefers partial shade.

Propagation: By seed, slow to germinate taking four to six weeks.



Bibliography

1. Anderson, pg. 48
2. Gerard, pg. 340-341
3. Bown, pg. 138
4. Anderson, pg. 48
5. Grieve, pg. 583-589
6. Ibid
7. Bown, pg. 138
8. Grieve, pg. 583-589

Illustrations:

1. Gerard, 1633
2. Schoffer, 1485
3. PSUMG 2005
4. PSUMG 2005
5. z.hubpages.com/u/166599_f260.jpg