

Common Name: **Henbane**

Genus: *Hyoscyamus*

Species: *niger*

Family: Solanaceae

AKA: Common Henbane, Hyoscyamus, Hog's-bean, Jupiter's-bean, Henbell (Anglo-Saxon)



Historical Uses:

Medical: "...But the juice is better than the liquor, & a more easer of pain...But first of all ye juice & that which is made of ye dry seed, is made for Collyries to take away pain, & for ye sharp & hot rhume, & for ye ear pains & with meal or Polenta both for ye inflammations of ye eyes, & of ye feet, & ye other inflamations..." (1)

"Henbane (bilsa) is cold and soft and does not have any powers. If someone eats it or the oil made from its seeds, it makes deadly poison in the person. But where a person has parasites so that they make the flesh sore, let the person rub the place with henbane juice, and the parasites will die. Oil made from its seed is not much use, but where there is too much heat rising up a person's members, anoint that place with its oil and it will cool the place without any other medicine. This oil is not useful for other ailments. However, when a drunk has returned to himself or herself, let the person put this juice in cold water, and wet the forehead, temples, and throat with it. The person will get better." (2)

"The sinphoniaca plant, which is henbane (is used for) earache, swollen knees or calves or other bdy swellings, for toothache, for genital soreness or swelling, for apinful breasts, for sore feet, for lung disease." (3)

"Henbane causeth drow sinesse, and mitigateth all kinde of paine: it is good against hot and sharpe distillations of the eyes and other parts: it stayeth bleeding and the disease in women: it is applied to inflammations of the stones and other secret parts." (4)





“...The leaves are good for cooling hot inflammations in the eyes, or other part of the body; and, being boiled in wine, and used as a foment, it will assuage all manner of swellings...also the gout, sciatica, and pains of the joints, if proceeding from a hot cause. Being applied with vinegar to the forehead and temple, it helpeth the head-ach, and causeth those to sleep who are prevented by hot violent fevers. The oil of the seed is good for deafness, and noise and worms in the ears...” (5)

Folklore/Astrology: “Culpepper says: ‘...The herb is indeed under the dominion of *Saturn* and I prove it by this argument: All the herbs which delight most to grow in saturnine places are saturnine herbs. Both Henbane delights most to grow in saturnine places, and whole cart loads of it may be found near the places where they empty the common Jakes, and scarce a ditch to be found without it growing by it...’” (6)

“The herb was used in magic and diabolism, for its power of throwing its victims into convulsions. It was employed by witches in their midnight brews, and from the leaves was

prepared a famous sorcerer’s ointment...In mythology, we read that the dead in *Hades* were crowned with it as they wandered hopelessly beside the *Styx*.” (7)

Cautions: “...The leaves, feed, and juyce taken inwardly causeth an unquiet sleepe like unto the sleep of drunkennesse, which continueth long, and is **deadly** to the party.” (8)

Contemporary Uses:

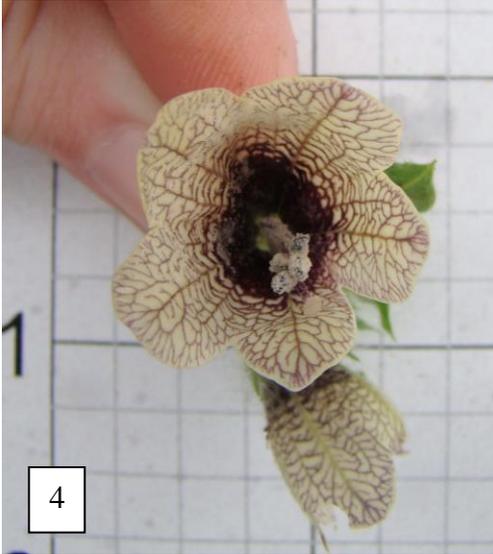
Parts Used: Fresh leaves, flowering tops and branches, seeds

Medicinal: “Antispasmodic, hypnotic, mild diuretic. The leaves have long been employed as a narcotic medicine. It is similar in action to bella-donna and stramonium, though milder in its effects.” (9)

“Internally for asthma, whooping cough, motion sickness, Menière’s syndrome, tremor in senility or paralysis, and pre-operative 3



Close-up of the flowers



medication. Excess causes impaired vision, convulsions, coma, and death from heart or respiratory failure. Externally for neuralgia and dental and rheumatic pain..." (10)

Area of Origin: Western Europe, North Africa, and Central/SW Asia

Physical description: Fetid annual or biennial with pale green, ovate leaves, to 12 inches long, which are very hairy and sticky.

Plant type: Annual/biennial

Height: 2-3'

Flower color: Cream, purple-veined 5-lobed

Flowering period: Spring to autumn

Soil type/requirements: Light, well-drained, neutral to alkaline soil in sun.

Fruit: Black capsules

Hardiness zone: USDA 5

Sun requirements: Full sun

Propagation: By seed sown in spring. Usually self-sows.

Cautions: "All parts are extremely toxic if eaten.

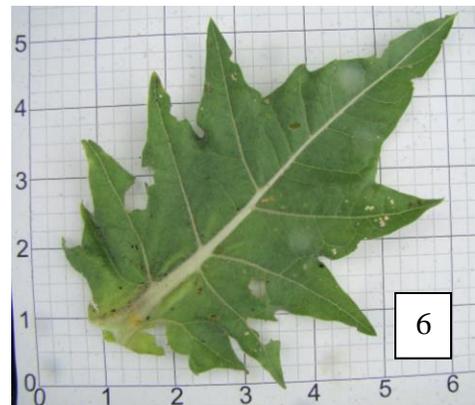
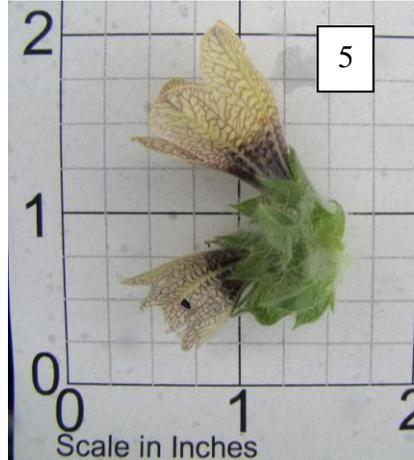
Possible skin irritant or allergen." (11)

Sources

1. Dioscorides, p. 464
2. Von Bingen, p.102-103
3. Van Arsdall, p.121
4. Gerard, p. 353-356
5. Culpepper, p. 72
6. Grieve, p. 397-403
7. Ibid
8. Gerard, p. 353-356
9. Grieve, p. 397-403
10. Bown, p. 239-240
11. Ibid

Illustrations/Images:

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| 1. Gerard's Herbal | 1005 |
| 2-7 PSUMG | 2014 |





Seeds from one seed capsule