

What's in a name?

The origins of this name date back to the Anglo-Saxons and has links to old German and Norse words. The Anglo-Saxons spelt it 'mucgwyt' but probably pronounced it as we do today. The head word (mug) is a direct reference to the fact that since the Iron Age the plant was used to flavour drinks. The second part is a direct reference to the Old English word for a 'root, herb or plant which is 'wyr't'. Similarities exist in Old High German where 'wurz' (pronounced wurtz), means root and the Old Norse word 'urt', means plant.



Botany & Ecology

Mugwort is a very common plant and can often be seen growing on waste ground. It can reach 3' high and often grows in dense clusters. The long, narrow V shaped leaves are silvery green on the underside and it is this which makes it stand out from other species around it.

Mugwort certainly attracts aphids which can be found in large quantities on the long upright stems. This is a good source of food for our ladybirds.



Folklore

The Anglo-Saxons believed that the plant should be dug up on Midsummer's Eve and go in search of a 'coal' secreted by the roots. This would give the finder and keeper protection from lightening, plague and carbuncles. This idea of harvesting it on a certain day as a protection from evil is reflected in Medieval Dutch and German folklore. Here, Mugwort is known as St John's plant and was picked on St. John's eve to ensure protection against ill health and misfortune.

Folk Medicine

This plant has long been associated with helping to treat women with conditions such as infertility, irregular menstruation and problematic pregnancy. This link goes back to the ancient Greeks and the Latin name *Artemisia*, which comes from the goddess Artemis who was famous for helping women give birth. North America Indians used tea made with dried leaves to treat colds and fevers. They also used it in washes and salves to treat bruises, itching, sores, eczema and to reduce underarm or foot odour. The leaves, when dried and crushed, were used as a snuff to relieve congestion, nosebleeds and headaches. Whilst there is no clinical evidence to support the benefits of using Mugwort, modern herbalists still prescribe it to calm the nervous system, reduce anxiety, alleviate intense headaches and as a treatment for epilepsy.

*Please note, readers should take advice from a qualified doctor or herbalist before using plants as a cure for ailments.