

Common Name: **Southernwood**

Genus: *Artemisia*

Species: *abrotanum*

Family: Asteraceae

AKA: Sothernwood, Lad's Love, Old Man, Boy's Love, Applingie, Garde Robe, Abrotonon,



Historical Uses:

Medical: “Used to cure cramps, paralysis, sciatica, strangury (painful urination); also as an emmenagogue (stimulate blood flow to pelvis and uterus). Also a vermifuge (expels intestinal worms) and an antidote for poison and venomous bites, eases intermittent fevers, clears away pimples and boils, and removes inflammations of the eyes when mixed with the pulp of cooked quince. Used to encourage the growth of a beard and to restore hair. When made into a plaster it is said to diminish tumors. Also used to dissolve phlegm and as an aphrodisiac.” (1)

“The tops, floures, or seed boyled, and stamped raw with water and drunke, helpeth them that cannot take their breath without their necks straight up and is a remedie for the cramp and for sinews shrunke or drawne together; for the sciatica also, and for those that can hardly make water; and it is good to bring down the termes. Also helps against the stinging of scorpions and field spiders, but it hurts the stomacke. Stamped and mixed with oyle it taketh away the shivering cold that commeth by the ague fits, and it heateth the body if it anointed therewith before the fits do come.” (2)



“Southernwood [*stagwurtz*] is warm and dry and has an odor. If a person is anointed with it and inhales the odor, it excites melancholy and anger and troubles on the head. But wherever scabies begin to appear on the head, let the person pour the juice of southernwood over the sores and be cured. And where boils erupt on the body, or wherever any other members be withered, let the person pound southernwood and put it around the place. Let them also



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Close-up of the fine textured leaves

anoint the place with its juice, and the person will be better. However, when the scabies and withered limbs persist, the southernwood should thereupon be removed since it then does more harm than good. If a person suffers from gout in his or her members, let them take sufficient southernwood, some old lard, and a little olive oil, and heat them in a frying pan. Then place this on the members where the gout rages, tying it with a piece of cloth.” (3)

“*Banckes’s Herbal* states ‘The virtue of this herb is thus, that if they break the seed and drink it with water, it healeth men that have been bitten by any venomous beast.’ Also, ‘this herb destroyeth worms. It is good for the cough and for binding in the belly and in the breast and for the disease in the bones.’ Furthermore, ‘this herb burnt and the ashes meddled with oil, it restoreth where any man lacketh hair.’ The *Hortus sanitatis* adds that ‘the smoke of this herb will drive away snakes from the house. It has a good smell.’ (4)

“For shortness of breath, sciatica, and difficulty urinating, the seeds of this plant help if pounded and drunk in water. For pain in the side, take the same plant and *betonica* [betony], pound them together, and give them to drink. For poison and for snakebite, take the same plant and give it to drink in wine. It helps very much. Also, pound it into oil and smear it on the body. It also helps cure fever chills. Moreover, the seed of this plant, scattered about or set on fire, effectively puts snakes to flight. For a bite from snakes we call *spalangiones* or scorpion, this plant is effective. For eye pain, take the same plant simmered with the plant we call *melacidonia* or quince, and mixed with bread as you would make a poultice. Apply this to the sore eyes, and the pain will be cured.” (5)

“The seeds of these being sodden and beaten raw, being drunk with water doth help ye Orthopnea, ruptures, convulsions, sciaticas, dysuries, and stoppage of ye menstura, & being drunk with wine it is an Antidot of deadly poisons. And with oil it is an ointment for those which have ye rigor. It drives away serpents being strewed under or suffumigated. And being drunk with wine helps them which are bitten. But particularly it is good for ye strokes of ye Phalangii & Scorpions. It doth also help ye inflammations of ye eyes being applied with sodden quince, or with bread. And it dissolves ye Pani being beaten small & sodden with barley meal. It is also mixed in ye composition of Oleum Irinum.” (6)

Culinary: Used for flavorings and in beverages.

Ornamental: Used to make chaplets (wreaths) for the dead.

Household: Moth repellent. Called *Garderobe* by the French as moths will not invest clothes that are in close proximity to the herb. Makes a deep yellow dye. (7)

Folklore/Astrology: “Hot and dry in the third degree. Under the rule of Mercury. Fumes of its smoke is said to drive snakes away. In magic it is used to protect children from witchcraft. Of two types, male and female (larger and smaller).” (8)

Contemporary Uses:

Parts Used: Leaves, branches, roots.

Medicinal: Used to improve digestion and liver functions, encourages menstrual flow and stimulates the uterus, lowers fevers, relaxes spasms, and destroys intestinal worms. Used internally for delayed or painful menstruation, poor appetite and digestion. It is reputed to stimulate hair growth. Externally used for frostbite, extracting splinters, sciatic pain, and swellings. (9)

Economic: Leaves are used in sachets and powders to repel moths and fleas. (10)

Cautions: Not given to pregnant women. (11)

Area of Origin: Southern Europe to temperate Asia

Physical description: Semi-evergreen with finely divided, aromatic, grayish-green leaves.

Plant type: Perennial

Form: Subshrub

Height: 24”

Flower color: Tiny, yellow but seldom if ever flowers in colder regions

Flowering period: August to September

Soil type/ requirements: Well-drained, neutral to slightly alkaline soils in sun. (12)

Hardiness zone: USDA 6-10

Sun requirements: Full sun

Propagation: Sow in spring or by cutting in summer. Can also be divided for replanting in autumn or spring. (13)

Sources:

1. Anderson, p. 40
2. Gerard, p. 1105-1107
3. Von Bingen, p.99
4. Freeman, p. 29
5. Van Arsdall, p. 208
6. Dioscorides, p. 262
7. Grieve 754-755
8. Anderson, p. 40
9. Bown, p.131-133
10. Ibid

11. Ibid
12. Ibid
13. Ibid

Illustrations:

1. Schoffer
2. PSUMG 2012
3. PSUMG 2012