

## ***Living Earth School of Herbalism Materia Medica***

### ***Leonurus cardiaca*** **MOTHERWORT HERB**

#### (A) Botany

**Family:** Lamiaceae (Mint).

**Synonym:** Common motherwort.

**Description:** The herb consists of the top 30-40% of the aerial parts of *Leonurus cardiaca* harvested in the early part of its flowering period from mid to late June. The lower 75-80% of the primary stalk and the lower 40-50% of any well developed secondary stalks of the harvested portion are removed and not used. The flowers are surrounded by sharp pointed bracts that can penetrate the skin. Handle with care or use gloves when harvesting and processing this herb.

**Related Species:** There are two other species of *Leonurus*, *L. japonicus* (Chinese motherwort) and *L. sibiricus* (Siberian motherwort). The latter has naturalized sporadically in the central United States. The traditional uses and research results on these species indicates that their properties are similar to those of *L. cardiaca*.

**Habitat:** Perennial. *Leonurus* primarily grows in transition areas and sometimes open woodlands. It prefers 40-60% direct sunlight, however, it can tolerate somewhat more or less than that.

**Distribution:** Alien. *Leonurus* is a native of continental Europe and the temperate regions of northwestern Asia. It has become naturalized throughout the temperate United States north of Florida and California, and the adjacent southern regions of Canada except in Newfoundland. It is relatively common in southern and eastern Ontario, becoming less common on the Canadian shield in the central part of the province.

#### (B) Therapeutics

**Administration:** Systemically: Fresh or dried herb infusion or tincture. The fresh herb tincture is preferred. Topically: Fresh or dried herb poultice, compress, infused oil or ointment.

**Primary Therapeutic Properties:** Analgesic, anticatarrhal, anticonvulsant, antidepressant, anti-inflammatory (local, neural, systemic), antioxidant, antispasmodic (digestive, general, respiratory, uterine), aperient, appetite stimulant, anxiolytic, astringent, bitter, cardiac, cholagogue, depurative, diaphoretic, diuretic, emmenagogue (stimulating, tonic), expectorant (relaxing, secretolytic, stimulating), febrifuge, hypotensive, nervine, parturient, relaxant, stomachic, tranquilizer, uterine (relaxant, stimulant, tonic), vascular tonic, vasodilator (neural, peripheral).

**Secondary Therapeutic Properties:** Anticardiotoxic, anticarcinogenic, anticardiotoxic, antineoplastic, antineurotoxic, antithyrotropic, antiviral, bronchodilator, cardiac, carminative, decongestant, emetic (in large doses), lymphatic, sedative, vulnerary.

**Primary Organ Systems:** Nervous system, cardiovascular system, female reproductive system, respiratory system, musculoskeletal system.

**Secondary Organ Systems:** Digestive system, skin, thyroid, urinary system.

**Primary Indications:** Stress-related conditions (nervousness, anxiety, depression, tension, headaches, muscle tension, mood swings, insomnia, poor memory or concentration, dementia); conditions of the cardiovascular system (poor peripheral circulation, nervous heart conditions, heart palpitations, hypertension, arrhythmia, cardiac weakness, hemorrhoids, varicose veins,

spider veins, arteriosclerosis, angina); conditions of the female reproductive system (amenorrhea, dysmenorrhea, PMS, menopause, infertility, prolonged labor, prolapsed uterus, uterine fibroids); feverish conditions (influenza, measles, chicken pox); conditions of the respiratory system (head colds, sinus infections, cough, bronchitis, asthma); rheumatic conditions (rheumatoid arthritis, rheumatism, fibromyalgia, gout).

**Secondary Indications:** Conditions of the digestive system (nervous dyspepsia, indigestion, liver and gallbladder congestion); chronic skin conditions (acne, eczema, psoriasis); neuralgia and neuritis; hyperthyroid; inflammatory conditions of the urinary tract (nephritis, cystitis, urethritis); epilepsy. Locally: Wounds and abrasions; bruises; sprains and strains; dermatitis; bites and stings; vascular weakness and inflammation (varicose veins, spider veins, hemorrhoids).

**Research:** *Leonurus cardiaca* has demonstrated antiarrhythmic, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antiphototoxic, cardiac, oxytocic and uterine tonic properties *in vitro*; anticardiotoxic, antioxidant, antispasmodic, hypotensive and sedative properties in animal studies; and antidepressant, anxiolytic and hypotensive properties in human clinical studies. Individual constituents have demonstrated anticardiotoxic, anticoagulant, antineoplastic, antioxidant, antiviral, oxytocic and uterine tonic properties *in vitro*; and anticarcinogenic, antineurotoxic and antioxidant properties in animal studies. The other two Eurasian species of *Leonurus* have demonstrated similar properties.

**Formulating:** 20-35% (15-100%). Astringency 3, bitterness 3, emmenagogue 3, pungency 0.

**Synergistic Combinations:** Combines well with *Ginkgo biloba* leaf (maidenhair tree), *Hypericum perforatum* herb (St. Johnswort), *Lavandula angustifolia* herb (English lavender), *Melissa officinalis* herb (lemon balm), *Passiflora* spp. herb (passionflower), *Scutellaria lateriflora* herb (scullcap), *Valeriana officinalis* root (valerian) and *Viburnum opulus* bark or fruit (high-bush cranberry) for stress-related conditions; with *Crataegus* spp. leaf, flower and fruit (hawthorn), *Ginkgo biloba* leaf, *Melissa officinalis* herb, *Passiflora* spp. herb, *Valeriana officinalis* root and *Zanthoxylum americana* bark (northern prickly ash) for cardiovascular conditions; and with *Lavandula angustifolia* herb, *Melissa officinalis* herb, *Mitchella repens* herb (partridgeberry), *Nepeta cataria* herb (catnip), *Rubus idaeus* leaf and flower (red raspberry), *Viburnum opulus* bark or fruit, and *Vitex agnus-castus* fruit (chaste tree) for conditions of the female reproductive system.

**Toxicity:** None known.

**Contraindications:** Not recommended during pregnancy except in the last month and during labor. Use with caution with hypothyroid or if taken concurrently with oral contraceptives, cardioactive, blood pressure, thyroid, anticonvulsant, sedative or mood-altering medications.

**Dosage and Duration Restrictions:** Class 1a. No restrictions except when included in formulations during the last month of pregnancy where it should only be included in formulations only, up to 20%. These restrictions are not necessary during labor.

**General Comments:** *Leonurus* is an incredibly versatile herb. It also combines well with most other herbs for the conditions for which it is recommended. It is particularly suited for conditions that are characterized by nervousness, anxiety, depression, mood swings and palpitations. It is also an excellent remedy for spasmodic conditions of all types including respiratory conditions such as asthma. *Leonurus* is also one of the best herbs for use during labor and as a post-partum remedy for pain, depression and to support uterine contractions both during labor and afterwards. It is an excellent tonic for the female reproductive system and will benefit almost any imbalance of this system. It is a specific whenever reproductive symptoms include mood swings, anxiety, depression or heart palpitations. The depurative properties of *Leonurus* are one area that I need to explore more. I have often seen good results when I was treating someone for other conditions, but have rarely used this herb specifically for that purpose. However, the preliminary results look very promising.