COMFREY (Latin "grow together") (Greek "to unite")
Fact sheet

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May 2012

Genus:

Symphytum officianale	(wild or common comfrey)
Symphytum uplandicum	(Russian or Quaker comfrey)
Symphytum asperrimum	(prickly or rough comfrey)

Family:

BORAGINACEAE – a perennial herb (also known as "knit bone")

- The leafy stem, can be 2 to 3 feet high, is stout, angular and hollow. The leaf & stem are covered with bristly hairs. The rough hairs can promote itching when touched.
- Bell shaped flowers – either creamy yellow, white, pink, blue or purple - appear in late spring/summer.
- Deep and expansive root system (as deep as 10 feet) – drought hardy and frost resistant (though will thrive in damp conditions). Will tolerate most soils. Mines the soil for minerals and nutrients (composting leaves passes these back into the soil.)
- Seed production rare, crops usually established from root cuttings planted 2"-4" deep and 2'-2.1/2' apart. Even the smallest piece can grow if the conditions are right. Buds around 3-6 weeks after planting.
- Plantings can last indefinitely (more than 20 years). Can be difficult to eradicate.
- Generally disease free – however, loved by snails. Can be used as a snail barrier.
- Prefers some sun/ some shade position.
- Likes a slightly alkaline soil at PH 7.2 but also grows well in Acid soil.
- Being perennial it will die down in winter (though in Sydney does not completely die down)
- Regular cutting prevents the plant from flowering.

History:

Native to Europe and Asia. Mentioned in "Wildflowers of Ireland"
Cultivated since Bible times as a healing herb. Used by the Greek and Romans.
Comfrey (Symphytum asperrimum), named for its bristly leaves, was brought to England from Russia around 1800.
Quaker, Russian, or blue Comfrey originated as a natural hybrid of S. officinale and S. asperrimum. This hybrid was called Caucasian or Russian comfrey in reference to its country of origin.
Promoted by Henry Doubleday (a British Researcher), who lived from 1813-1902 and who saw it as a possible food source during the Irish potatoe famine of the 1840's

In 1954 Lawrence D Hills established the Henry Doubleday Research Association to further research and grow Comfrey commercially. He developed cultivars at Bocking near Brantree in Essex –hence cultivars are now described as Bocking 14 Cuttings and so on, and there are some 20 clones that differ slightly in plant vigour and general organic structure
Supplies of this hybrid were shipped to Canada in 1954 and it was named Quaker Comfrey after the religion of Henry Doubleday (also to make it more commercially attractive-rather than "Russian).

Constituents:

Comfrey is the only land plant that takes vitamin B12 from the soil. The entire plant is a good source of vegetable protein, and the green leaves contain vitamins A, C, E, and several B vitamins, including choline, folic acid, some B12, minerals of calcium, potassium, phosphorus, some iron, a little iodine, and many other trace minerals. Comfrey is one of the richest sources of silicon in the botanic world, surpassed only by horsetail grass. High amounts of Allantoin contained especially in its roots appear to beneficially affect the rate of cell multiplication and hence healing. This substance is also found in the milk of nursing mothers and in the umbilical cord.
It also contains mucilage a binding substance.

The leaves contain Chlorophyll a valuable blood purifier and a catalyst to promote healing.
Controversy over ingesting Comfrey, especially the root, due to the pyrrolizidine alkaloids or PAs has caused comfrey to be taken off herbal medicines and warnings given that it causes liver damage. This is still out for debate as some feel the tests were not conclusive.

Usage over time:

Heals wounds, sores, ulcers, burns, swollen tissue, arthritis, swelling around broken bones, bronchitis and other respiratory and urinary conditions.
Generally used as a poultice, but can be taken as a tea.
Allantoin can be applied as an ointment or a solution.
The fresh leaves are often fed to pigs, horses, sheep and poultry. Cattle and rabbits are fed with the wilted foliage.
Used on the continent to tan leather and make it waterproof and in Angora they prepare a kind of glue from the root that they use in the spinning of their fine goats fleece. Germans also utilise that glue in the spinning of flax and wool.
Colour makers utilise the roots and somehow extract a beautiful crimson colour from it.

And in the garden:

An excellent fertiliser. Provides a nutrient boost and activating process to compost adding nitrogen and potash.

Great for tomato, pepper, cucumber and potato plants.

Leaves can be spread over beds and left to decompose releasing plant nutrients.

As a liquid fertiliser: leaves left in water for several weeks and the resulting dark liquid then diluted with water- 1 part to 10 parts of water. Rejuvenates sick plants and enlivens new plantings.

: The Henry Doubleday Research Association (now Garden Organic). "To advance research, education and science for the public benefit by the improvement of scientific and practical horticulture, through the application of organic methods and principles"
www.gardenorganic.org.uk