

בוצין – Mullein – *Verbascum Thapsus*

Self-Assurance from the Strong, Independent Mullein

Mullein grows in my garden almost all year long. During the summer, it's long stalks display myriads of delicate, tiny yellow flowers. The flower-spike can attain a height of more than 2 meters (7 feet) and is covered with densely crowded, sulphur-yellow blossoms, blooming during Tamuz and Av (July/August). In the winter, the mullein's fuzzy leaves grow near the ground, forming a beautiful rosette. We didn't quite have enough rains yet for the new baby-mullein to sprout forth, but since mullein is a biannual plant, I was able to find a few of last year's basal rosettes even now during the fall. In the very heart of the old rosettes' there is new-growth, with the appearance of baby mullein leaves. I harvested several handfuls of these wooly little treasures. Later, when the new rosettes grow large and abundant, I will gather a supply for winter use, but for now, it is a tender little treat to help chase away congestion and renew our lungs. Near the mullein rosettes, I noticed some tall, dried out flower-stalks ready to reseed. I plan to scatter these seeds in my back garden, but not surrounding the trees, since, mullein has a strong independent nature, which makes it intolerant of growing in the shade of other plants. This prevents it from becoming an aggressively invasive weed that would threaten the growth of cultivated plants. The mullein seeds remain in the soil for extended periods of time, and can sprout from apparently bare ground, and even after forest fires. When you feel muddled or fragmented, the strong independent mullein may give you the self-assurance required to reintegrate your mind and spirit, especially when used as an aromatic oil. Some people take 'mullein baths' in order to become brave and gain protection against enemies.



Mullein – The Lung Healer that Looks Like Lungs

The healing importance of mullein cannot be underestimated. Although this versatile herb has multiple medicinal properties, its strongest feature is as a remedy against coughs of any kind. The combination of expectorant, emollient and mucilage properties makes the plant particularly effective for cough. Dioscorides first recommended mullein 2000 years ago, against diseases of the lung. Its primary use is still to heal lung and respiratory ailments such as persistent coughs, asthma, hay fever, bronchitis, and whooping cough. When you look closely at the mature mullein leaves, you may notice that their shape looks very much like human lungs. By making plants look like the organs that they heal, Hashem is teaching us how to best benefit from the abundance of medicinal herbs that He granted us.

A Torch & Candlewick Herb

Mullein may have gotten its name from a Celtic term meaning 'yellow,' thanks to the yellow blossoms that crown the stalk, or from the Latin word that means 'soft,' because of its downy soft leaves. Its Latin name 'Verbascum' may be a corruption of 'Barbascum,' from the Latin 'Barba' – 'beard,' alluding to its hairy leaves. Among its 40 names in English, I will mention only 'Beggars,' blanket,' 'Moses' Blanket,' and 'Aaron's Rod.' Another name for Mullein is 'Torch Plant,' since the dried flower spike was used as a nighttime torch. The flower spike soaked in pine resin and set on fire acts as a huge wick for up to a full hour. Similarly, the name 'Hig Candlewick,' resembles its Hebrew name בוצין/Butzin, which means candle in Aramaic. Indeed, when Mullein raises its tall Menorah shaped branches bursting with yellow florets, it resembles the Temple candelabrum even more than the sage plant, due to its illuminating yellow blossoms. Since mullein manages on

Herbal Remedies from the Judean Hills - Months of Tishrei/Cheshvan

poor soil and the Common Desert Mullein grows in the Judean desert, Dead Sea valley, Ein Gedi, the Northern Negev and in the Aravah, it is possible that the Desert Wick mentioned in the Mishnah refers to Desert Mullein:

משנה מסכת שבת פרק ב משנה א

בְּמָה מְדַלִּיקִין וּבְמָה אֵין מְדַלִּיקִין. אֵין מְדַלִּיקִין לֹא בְּלֶחֶשׁ, וְלֹא בְּחֹסֶן, וְלֹא בְּכֶלֶה, וְלֹא בְּפִתִּילַת הָאֵידָן, וְלֹא בְּפִתִּילַת הַמַּדְבָּר, וְלֹא בִירוּקָה שֶׁעַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם.

With what may we kindle [the Sabbath lights], and with what may we not kindle [them; i.e., what may the wicks be made of and which oils may be used as fuel]? We may not kindle [them] with lechesh [the inner wool-like bark of a cedar tree], hosen [uncarded flax], chalach [an inferior grade of silk], a wick of edan [the inner wool-like bark of a willow tree], and not with desert wick (*Mishnah Shabbat 2:1*).

Rambam explains that the desert wick refers to a plant whose leaves are used for lighting. This characterizes the mullein plant, as its dried leaves are highly flammable and can be used as candlewicks or to ignite a fire quickly. However, mullein was disqualified for use as Shabbat candlewicks, perhaps because it produces too much smoke.

Happy Hopeful Reintegration of Mind & Spirit

Mullein has traditionally been smoked by the Native Americans to relieve irritation of respiratory mucus membranes, and the hacking cough of congestion. They were made into cigarettes for asthma and spasmodic coughs. In addition, mullein leaves are believed to have sedative and narcotic properties, which can provide a mild, legal high when smoked. (Something neither my herbal workshop students nor myself have tried!). Whether you look to the Far East or European traditions, you’ll find mullein known not only for its health-giving qualities but also as a spiritual protection to ward off curses and evil spirits. The Navajos believed that this herb reduced negative thoughts and offered relief from mental disorders. Light Workers feel that when carried, it safeguards healers from illness and guides their work. What about a mullein necklace?! Mullein represents focus and grounding. The tall masculine mullein stalk together with its feminine flowers balance male and female energies. The cheerful yellow flowers are gentle reminders of youthful joy and laughter that engenders Simcha – happiness. Look to this plant when you’re sad, hopeless or find yourself having creative blockages. Mullein helps reset your energy field to accept healthier, enthusiastic energies. It also gives you the energy necessary to face mental challenges. Some use mullein stalks as an alternative to candles for clearing random psychic energy.

Mullein: A Remedy for Various Conditions from Ear infection to Hemorrhoids

Mullein tea provides vitamins B2, B5, B12, & D, choline, PABA, sulfur, magnesium, mucilage, saponins, and more. Mullein has very marked demulcent, emollient and astringent properties, which render it useful for chest complaints, bleeding of the lungs and bowels. Mullein oil is a strong antibacterial destroyer of disease germs. The fresh flowers, steeped for 21 days in olive oil, can make an excellent bactericide. Gerarde tells us that “Figs do not putrify at all when wrapped in the leaves of Mullein.” An infusion of the flowers in olive oil is used for earache, or as a local application in the treatment of mucous membrane inflammation, as well as against frostbite, eczema, warts, hemorrhoids and other external conditions. Mullein oil may also be rubbed into the chest to alleviate cough and bronchitis. Woolly mullein leaves can be worn in the stockings to promote circulation and keep the feet warm. An alcoholic tincture from the fresh herb is beneficial for migraine or headache.

Herbal Remedies from the Judean Hills - Months of Tishrei/Cheshvan

Hands On: Mullein has been a popular medicinal plant since ancient times as a remedy for throat and breathing ailments. As a dried herb, it can alleviate chronic coughs, swollen glands, asthma and earaches. Some of the most brilliant results have been obtained for healing inflammation of the inner ear by a single application of Mullein oil. In acute or chronic cases, two or three drops of this oil should be made to fall in the ear twice or thrice in the day (Dr. William Thomas Fernie, *Herbal Simples*). Mullein oil may also alleviate eczema and other skin problems.

Dried Mullein Leaves

1. Pick leaves off the mullein plant. The best time to do this is later in the day, when any dew has evaporated.
2. Place the leaves on a mesh cloth or cookie screen, ensuring that they are not piled up on each other.
3. Allow the mullein leaves to dry for several days. You may turn the leaves to ensure they get a free flow of air and are kept away from moisture.
4. Check if the leaf crumbles easily. Then it is ready to be stored.
5. Store dried leaves in an airtight container away from sunlight.

Mullein Tea

1. Pour 1 cup of boiling water over 1-2 teaspoons of dried mullein flowers and leaves.
2. Cover and steep for 10-15 minutes.
3. Pour the liquid through a fine cloth such as a cheesecloth or a coffee filter to strain out the plant's tiny hairs, which may irritate the throat, and of course to strain out any possible bugs.
4. You can drink up to 3 cups of mullein tea daily. You may sweeten the tea with honey.