

## Plantain – *Plantago Lanceolata* (Ribwort Plantain) – לחך מצוי

### Accessible, Edible, Effective, Bug-Bite and Skin Healer

Even before the blessed winter rains filled my garden with weeds, plantain has been a perpetual year-round guest. I have used it to make a poultice to treat bee stings successfully. Just macerate it in the food processor together with a little honey and baking soda. The Native

Americans also used plantain to draw out toxins from stings and bites, including snakebites, as well as to heal wounds and cure fever. There are two main types of plantains: the ones with broad leaves called *Plantago Major* is found in Europe and America. The narrow-leaved type grows everywhere here in Israel. They have similar healing properties, however, the broadleaf plantain has larger, softer, edible leaves. It was only in the last year or so, that, I began to use plantain as a food by adding it to my green smoothie. Although, I've read that tender leaves can be eaten fresh in salads, while the older leaves have to be cooked, I find that the leaves of the narrow leaved plantain available in our region a bit tough and chewy. Yet, in smoothies, the blender takes care of that. Adding plantain to our diet is a wise choice, since it contains minerals, such as calcium, iron and zinc, as well as vitamins A, C and especially K. Vitamin K helps stop bleeding from cuts and wounds. Plantain is one of the medicinal herbs, which is easy to find, as it grows everywhere! Therefore, it received the nickname, 'Englishman's Foot' (or the White Man's Foot), for wherever Europeans have taken possession of the soil, plantain springs up. Plantain is known for being extremely effective in treating skin rashes, cuts, sores, burns and any kind of bug bite. It rapidly draws out infection, pain and venom. What, most people don't know is that plantain has an equally powerful effect on the human spirit.



### Plantain Draws out Worries and Soothes the Soul

Just as plantain soothes the skin, it also works to soothe our soul. The plantain personality is a reliable ally. Always there for us, whenever we need it, it never fails to work in any task we ask of it. It is a straight, upright, resilient, faithful friend through thick and thin. Part of plantain's spiritual medicine is that it brings a quality of acceptance, with its reassuring message of 'No Worries!' Just as plantain draws out venom from a sting or bite, it draws out our sense of compassion and of vulnerability until we no longer feel so vulnerable, or at least not frightened. It is part of the plantain personality to be consistent and clear. If you break a leaf, the central veins that run through the leaf, will take more effort to break than the rest of the leaf, teaching us that healthy boundaries can bend, because there's no need to react to things that are not actually threatening. Plantain's humility is expressed by the fact that it is a very low growing plant, thriving where no other plant can manage, particularly in earth that has been trampled by many people. The leaves themselves are juicy but tough, imparting the message of robust strength, yet flexible, and able to be soft and soothing when needed. At the onset of summer, plantain flowers appear on long, slim, tough, pretty flower stems, with flowering heads in pale pink color, surprisingly eye-catching against the roadsides. Resembling miniature ballerinas, they add a delicateness to plantain's stout, tough leaves. Thus, plantain potency is strong and versatile. This often over-looked, common lawn weed can truly touch our soul and provide healing to our body, mind and spirit.

### Plantain – A Wild Weed Free for the Taking

Another benefit of plantain is that it is *hefker* – free for the taking. When we are in a rush and don't have time to tithe the produce, picking plantain is a quick solution, since it doesn't require tithing. Plants, fruits, berries etc. that grow wild in nature do not need *ma'aser* (tithes) taken from them, since the Levite and the Kohen, can pick for themselves. Edible weeds that grow by themselves, even in a private garden do not need to be *ma'asered*. Cultivated herbs such as mint, sage, lemongrass etc. do require *ma'aser*. However, if we don't consume the herb itself but only the water that has absorbed its taste *ma'aser* is taken without a blessing. When eating cultivated herbs as a spice in soups, casseroles, salads and stir-fries etc. then we need to take *ma'aser* with a blessing.

### Medicinal Properties of Plantain

Plantain has wide-ranging antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties that prevent infection and accelerate healing. Plantain is also astringent with a cleansing effect on the body. It helps dry up excess secretions in the respiratory tract and the digestive system, thus being useful in treating colds and diarrhea. Its astringency is moderated by the demulcent effect of the mucilage in the herb, so this herbal remedy is much gentler than other commonly used astringents. Due to its astringent properties, Plantain leaves stop hemorrhage, in minor wounds. The fresh leaves are applied whole or bruised in the form of a poultice. Rambam writes, "I know a woman whose blood was flowing abundantly for four days and did not stop, until on the fourth day, we treated her with juice from the large plantain and the flow stopped altogether. This juice is useful for bleeding caused by a canker in an organ. When using it for this kind of sickness, I usually mix with it some stronger medicines. This I do with consideration of the amount of blood that was lost" (*Maimonides' Medical Writings* vol. 5, *The Art of Cure* p. 61). Rambam also used plantain for treating internal wounds in the uterus, bladder and intestines (*ibid.* p 63). He includes plantain among the herbs that treat sick organs "by pushing a little while helping to dissolve" (*ibid.* p. 173). Rambam also included plantain in a medical rubbing oil for an overweight man (*ibid.* p 176). Plantain alleviates dysentery and all other stomach and intestinal troubles. "Someone who feels like he has to throw up but can't, should eat plantain every five days. This will clean his stomach from the *balagan* (mess) and he won't need to throw up" (*Medicinal Plants from the Rambam* p. 144). Shakespeare mentions plantain as a skin healer in three of his plays. For example, "These poore slight sores neede not a Plantin" (*Two Noble Kinsmen*, I, ii). Other uses of plantain in folk medicine include treatment of urinary infection, sore throat, diarrhea, eye infection and constipation.

### How to Use Plantain for Healing [Adapted from Natural Living Ideas](#)

Plantain is useful to heal both external and internal ailments. Here are some examples of how we can use this herb for healing.

**Burns** – Apply a poultice immediately and apply a bandage with leaves. Follow it up with a [plantain salve](#).

**Cuts and open sores** – Stop bleeding from fresh cuts by applying crushed plantain leaves. Wash with plantain tea or diluted tincture (1 tbsp. to a glass of water) to prevent infections and promote healing.

**Hemorrhoids** – Steep leaves in tea for 30 min. inject a tablespoon several times a day and after bowel movement.

**Boils and acne** – Touch with a drop of tincture or apply salve.

## Herbal Remedies from the Judean Hills - Months of Shevat/Adar

**Mouth ulcers** – Swish 2-3 Tbsp. plantain tea in the mouth 3-4 times a day. You can also use 1 tbsp. of tincture diluted with a cup of water.

**Throat pain/infection** – Gargle with plantain tea or diluted tincture. Take 5-10 drops of tincture under the tongue and ingest it slowly.

**Dandruff and other scalp problems** – Apply plantain tea or oil infusion to the scalp and wash off after an hour.

**Poison ivy/sumac/oak** – Apply a poultice immediately, and then wash the area with plantain tea. Apply plantain sludge (obtained from draining the tea) until the stinging pain is gone.

**Sunburn** – Apply fresh poultice or plantain sludge liberally. Wash the area with the tea and then apply the salve.

**To improve liver and kidney function** – Drink 1-2 glasses of plantain tea every day.

**For relief from gastrointestinal inflammation** – Take the tincture under the tongue or drink plantain tea.

**For cold, flu, and respiratory infections** – Take the tincture under the tongue or drink freshly brewed warm tea with [honey](#).

### Hands On:

There is a very simple way of making a poultice that doesn't require a food processor. This is the quickest and most effective way to use this healing herb. Keep a mental note of where you can find plantain for emergencies- in case of insect bite, bee sting, or poison ivy exposure.

### Plantain Poultice

1. Grab a few plantain leaves.
2. Crush them between the palms, or pound them with a stone.
3. Apply directly to the skin.

If you are using it on yourself, just chew the leaves and use it as a poultice.

The mucilage from the bruised leaves will immediately soothe the pain, while the anti-inflammatory effect of the herb reduces swelling and redness. The poultice will also draw out the toxins from the sting, so it works best when applied immediately.

### Plantain Tea

1. Collect 1 cup fresh plantain leaves.
2. Wash the plantain leaves thoroughly and keep them covered in a bowl with a lid.
3. Boil 2 cups water and pour over the leaves in the bowl. Cover with the lid and let them steep until the bowl is cold to the touch.
4. Strain the tea and store in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.

Drink 1-2 cups of this plantain tea a day to control diarrhea or to get relief from the symptoms of cold and fever. You can drink it plain or add honey for taste. It can bring relief to people who have stomach ulcers or other inflammatory diseases of the gastrointestinal tract. Plantain tea can be used as a general tonic too.

Use plantain tea topically to wash wounds, boils, and skin damaged by sunburn, rashes, eczema etc.