

The East London Garden Society

Plant Facts

Burdock



Burdock is a large biennial that looks like rhubarb. Common Burdock grows three to five feet tall whereas Great Burdock can grow four to nine feet tall.

The leaves are large, coarse and wavy edged resembling an elephant's ear. The leaves grow in a basal rosette and can grow up to two feet long and one foot wide. The undersides of the leaves are densely woolly.

The leaves grow on a single erect leaf stalk which has a purple green hue. The stems of Great Burdock (*Arctium Lappa*) are furrowed and resemble the shape of celery whereas those of Common Burdock (*Arctium Minus*) are hollow and not furrowed. Both species are edible.

The width of the young burdock taproot is approximately the diameter of a pencil, but it is extremely long, often up to four feet in length. This is why it is so difficult for gardeners to eradicate it from their gardens. Gardeners grow edible nutritious vegetables yet work so hard to keep Burdock out even though it is highly nutritious and quite palatable.

It flowers in the summer of the second year and produces purple flowers with thistle like burrs. Burdock can be found on disturbed soils of roadsides and waste areas.

Wild Food Uses:

Using the young leaves, roots, young flowers and leaf stalks, Burdock is a highly nutritious plant with excellent medicinal qualities. The young leaves can be added to salads or boiled in several changes of water. The root of the first-year plant can be eaten spring through autumn, and the root of the second-year plant can be eaten in early spring before the flower stalk appears. Once the flower stalk appears but before it has produced a flower, it can be picked, peeled and eaten. Young leaves and flower stalks are best when parboiled for a minute or so to remove the bitterness.

Medicinal Uses:

Root tea used as a blood purifier and diuretic, stimulates bile secretion, digestion and sweating. It is also used for gout, liver and kidney ailments, rheumatism and gonorrhoea. The root contains high levels of insulin (up to 50

per cent) which has traditionally been used to treat diabetes. The flowers and leaves also have antibacterial properties. A tea from the leaves and stems has been used to treat rheumatism, and tea mixed with brown sugar has been used to treat measles. The seeds are used as a diuretic.