

# HomeGrown Herbalist School of Botanical Medicine



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**Stealing is bad.**

**Don't be bad.**



Dr. Patrick Jones

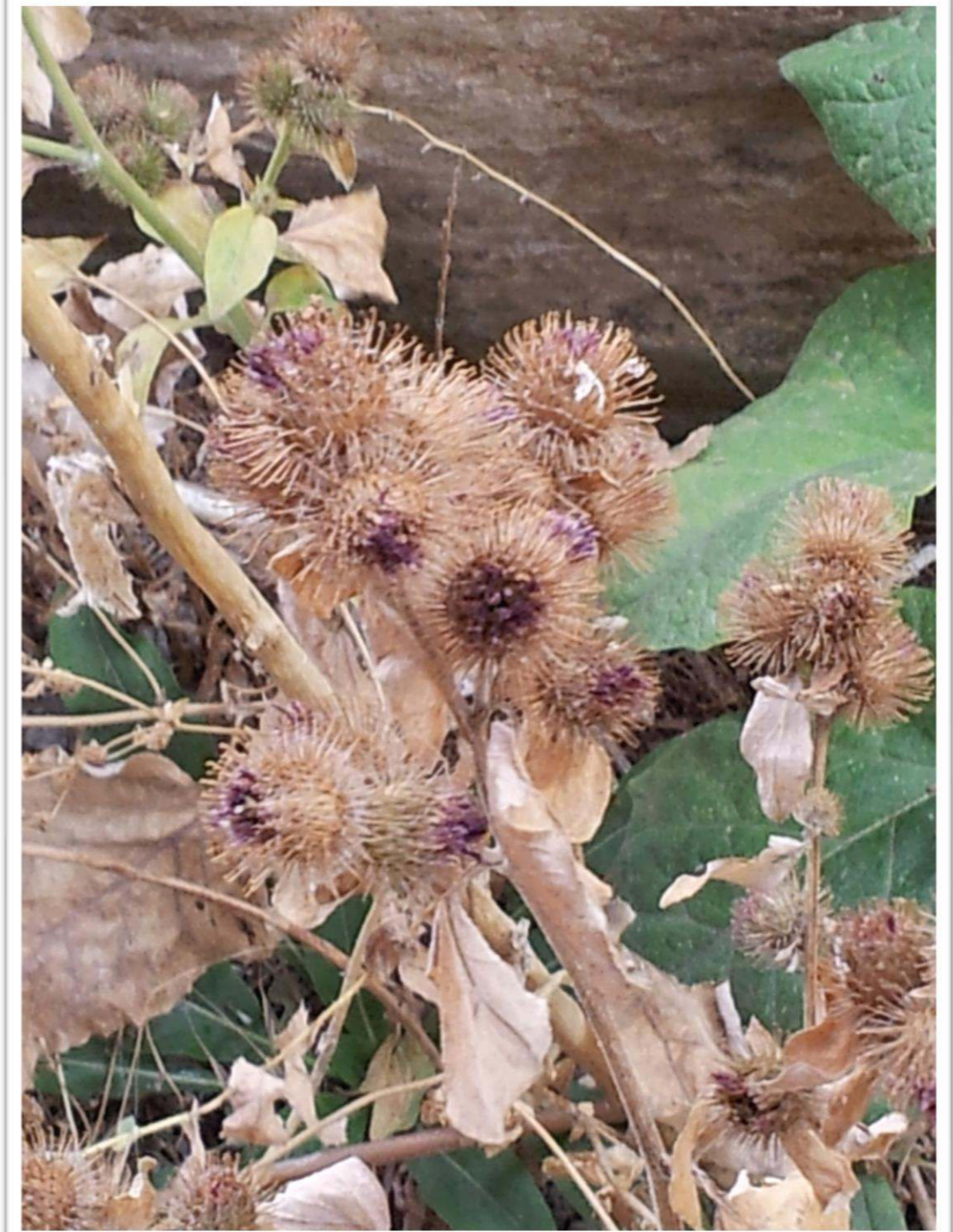
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# Burdock

*Arctium lappa*  
(or *Arctium minus*)

## Plant Monograph

*Dr. Patrick Jones*



# Taxonomy:

Kingdom: Plantae

Angiosperms

Eudicots

Asterids

Order: Asterales

Family: Asteraceae

Subfamily: Carduoideae

Tribe: Cynareae

Genus: *Arctium*

Species: *Arctium lappa*





*Carl Linnaeus*  
(1707–1778)

## Etymology

Burdock comes from the combination of two words; bur from *bhars*, the Proto-Indo-European word for bristle or spike, and dock from the Old English word *docce* which means bundle or tuft. The English stole the word *docce* from the Germans (who said *dokken*) but the Germans didn't care because Germans don't like weeds anyway.

*Arctium* is from from Greek *arctos*, "bear". *Lappa* is from the Old English *Laeppa* which means skirt. This is apparently an attempt to describe the wrapping of rough and grumpy bristles surrounding the flower bases.

The Latin name was given by pioneer taxonomist Carl Linnaeus who had named so many plants by the time he named burdock that he'd used up all the really good names.

## Burdock & Velcro



*George de Mestral*

George de Mestral was a Swiss electrical engineer that enjoyed hunting. He didn't particularly enjoy removing the burrs from his dog and his clothes after each hunt. But, as Louis Pasteur said, *"opportunity favors the prepared mind"*.

George found the hooking mechanism of the burdock burrs intriguing and went on to copy the rascals in plastic and invent Velcro. It was patented in 1955 and he made millions of dollars selling the stuff. NASA bought some and put it on their space suits making burdock the first space weed...well, at least by plastic proxy.

**Take Home Message:** Pay attention to the weeds. They'll teach you cool things.

## ***Burdock Ain't Cocklebur!***

Burdock is a completely different critter than cocklebur.  
While cocklebur is medicinal, it's actions are different.



Cocklebur  
(*Xanthium strumarium*)



Burdock  
(*Arctium lappa*)



Cocklebur  
(*Xanthium strumarium*)



Burdock  
(*Arctium lappa*)

## Common Names:

Burdock, Lappa, Beggar's Buttons, Bardane

## Medicinal Parts:

Root, Leaves, Seeds

## Constituents:

Root: Inulin, essential oil, aspartic acid, glutamic acid

Plant/Leaf: Aplotaxene, arctic acid, arctigenins, arctiin, arctinones, cnicinolide, dihydrocostus-lactones, iso-valeric acid, lappaol-A through H, lappaphen- A & B.

Seed: Daucosterol, neoarctin



## Veterinary Applications

Burdock is safe for use in dogs, cats, aardvarks, penguins and other critters with legs. Use it for the same issues for which you'd use it in humans.



## Preparation & Dosage:

Standard infusion of 1 tsp dried root 2-3 times daily (cold infusion is better than warm). Tincture 40-50% ethanol 1:5 ratio. Adult dose 10-30 drops 2-3 times daily.

Burdock has very wide safety margins.

It doesn't matter how you get burdock into your body. Chew the roots, make a tea, put it in your smoothie, use a tincture or put it into capsules. It tastes pretty good for an herb.



## Edible Parts:

In Japan, China, and Korea, the root is considered a tasty vegetable. The Japanese call it *gobo*. In china it's *Niubang* and in Korea they call it *Ueong*.

They slice and soak it in water and then boil it or fry it. They also deep fry it to make chips. Sadly, these folks have only recently discovered the potato for such things. But, being an Idahoan, I may be a bit biased.



*Gobo chips*

# Description:

Burdock is a biennial plant producing large, fuzzy, coarse leaves the first year and bolting vertically the second year to produce an upright, branched stem four to six feet tall. The leaves are opposite and are broadest at their base and lighter in color on the bottom than the top. The burrs form in the summer of the second year and have a purple flower at the end.



*1st Year Plant*



*2nd Year Plant*

**Did I mention that the leaves  
can get pretty big?**



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## Contraindications:

Don't take *Burdock* root if you don't want to feel better...Otherwise, there are no contraindications.

Don't take the seed during pregnancy or it may cause spotting.

Theoretically, someone could be allergic to burdock, but I've never seen it.



## Cultivation:

Like most enthusiastic, pernicious weeds, burdock is fairly easy to grow. It likes a fair amount of water and reasonably good soil. Poke the seeds in the dirt and stand back. They don't care if it's sunny or shady. It is also happy to self-seed if there is dirt near the parent plants.

It's a biennial, so if you don't want it back, cut off the stalks on the second-year plants before they go to seed, and it won't come back...unless there are already seeds in the dirt from some other year.



# Harvesting:

Like all biennials, burdock roots are best harvested in the fall of the first year or early spring of the second. While you dig the first-year roots, the dead grandma plants nearby will festoon you with burrs in case you forgot to harvest seed as well. I find singing a hymn helps me not say bad words when harvesting burdock root. The roots go down several feet. Just get *most* of it. Life is too short for persistence in some activities.

Be sure to cut the roots into small slices before drying them or they'll be no fun to grind.

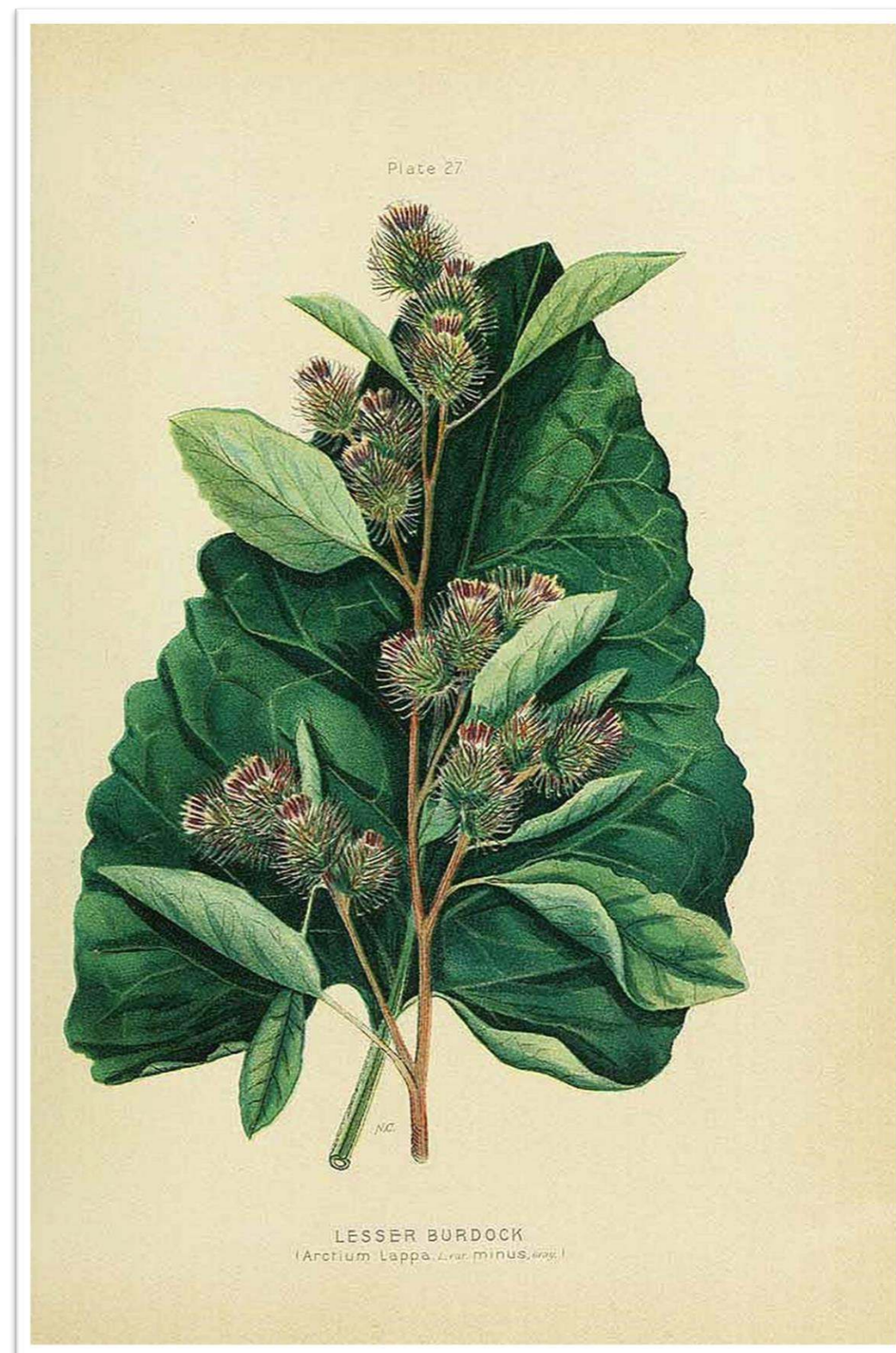


# Harvesting:

The roots are the primary medicine and are all that I ever use for anything, but the leaves and seeds have some medicinal value as well.

The leaves are easy enough to collect. The seeds, on the other hand, are a lot of work. To collect seeds, the dead brown burrs need to be broken open (use a rolling pin or crush them between a couple of bricks or put them in a heavy trash bag and run over them with your car) and the seeds fished out. The dust and little hairs from this work is very irritating to the skin, eyes and lungs. Wear goggles, a mask and a long-sleeve shirt you'd like to throw away when you're done.

Or...just use the root.



# ***Burdock In Traditional Chinese Medicine:***

The Chinese mostly use the seed and call it *Niu Bang Zi* (牛旁子). My Chinese isn't great, but I believe this means "*Why the heck didn't I just use the roots?*"

**TCM Meridians Affected:** Lung, Stomach

## **TCM Indications:**

Disperse wind-heat and benefit the throat.

Relieve toxins and decrease swelling.

Moisten the intestines. It's also a strong kidney Yin tonic.

Sore throats, mumps, hives, mouth and tongue abscesses and ulcerations.

**TCM Contraindications:** Spleen weakness with diarrhea or in Qi and blood deficiency. Not appropriate with oozing open sores.



*Burdock Seed*  
*Niu Bang Zi*  
**牛旁子**

# Burdock in Western Herbalism



# Chronic vs Acute Conditions

Budock is a gentle herb that is best suited for more chronic conditions. Because much of its medicinal effect is secondary to its removal of toxins in the body, it sometimes takes a little time to start seeing results.

The leaf and seed are more useful for acute conditions like bladder infections and such.

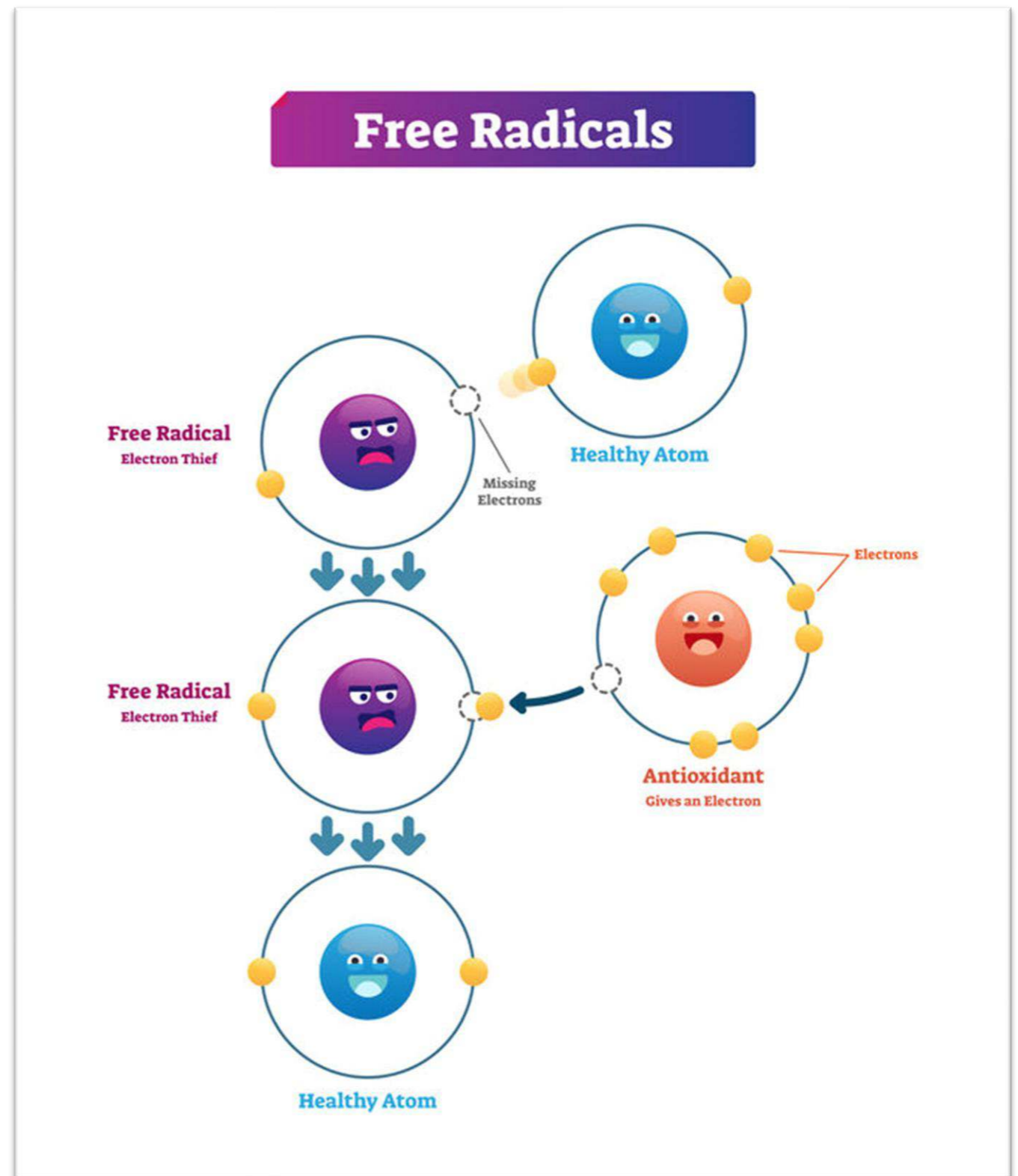
So, if you have a rash, use the leaf or seed. If you have eczema, use the root.



# Burdock The Anti-Oxidant

Burdock root has significant anti-oxidant properties. It scavenges free radicals and reactive oxygen from the body. This reduces oxidative stress and cell damage or destruction from the free radicals.

Research has shown that the water extracts seem to have more anti-oxidant activity than tinctures.



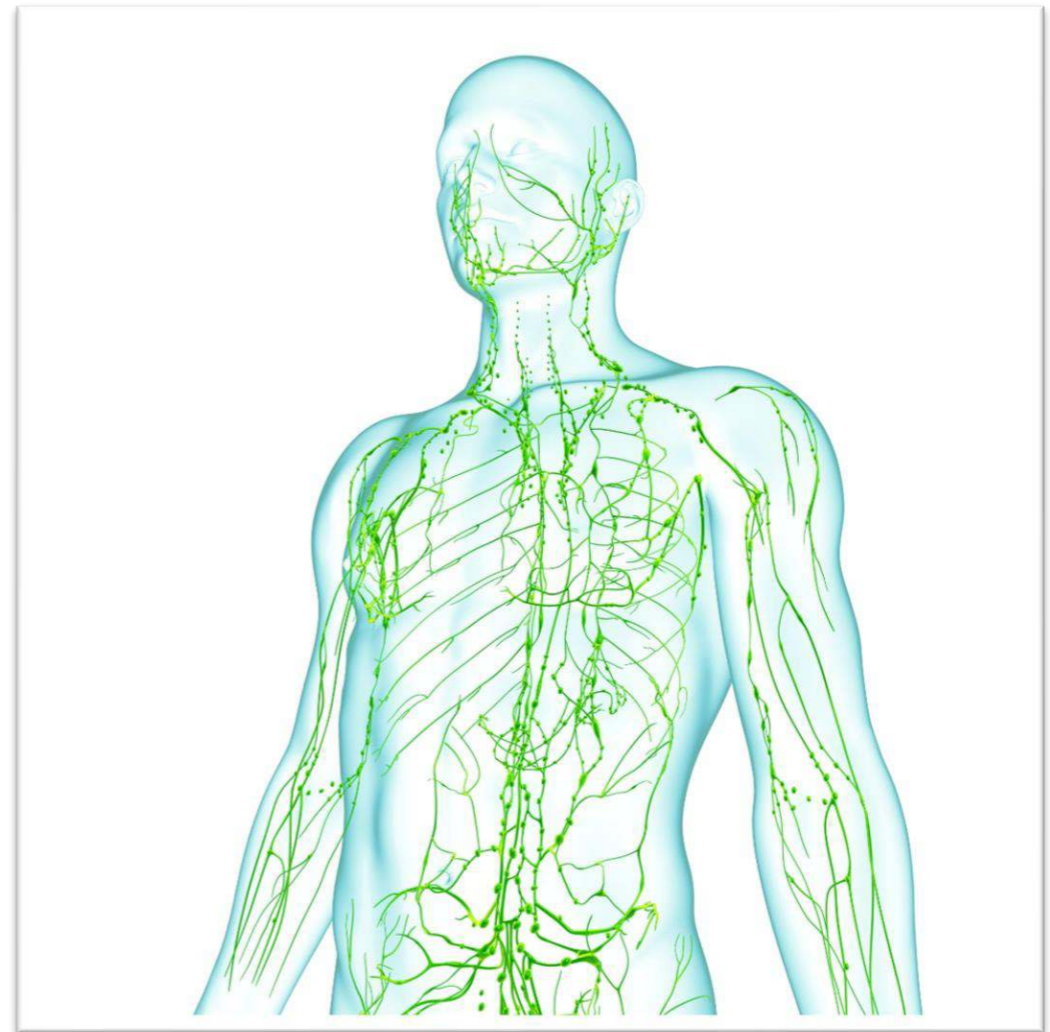
# Radiation, heavy metals and other toxins

Burdock has recently been shown to have some very good effects for helping the body to eliminate radiation, heavy metals and other serious toxins.



# Lymphatic congestion

Burdock has a positive effect on circulation in general and the lymphatic system in particular. It is good for lymphatic drainage in cases of lymphatic congestion.



# Uterine Tonic

Some herbalists have said that burdock root is good for the uterus.

I think it is a good uterine tonic, and strengthens the uterus generally. This is probably simply due to its nutritive benefits and its improvement of circulation and purification of the blood.

The eclectic herbalist Nicholas Culpeper said that burdock was good for prolapsed uterus. He said that putting a burdock root on the forehead would draw the uterus back into the body.

**Take Home Message:** Even famous herbalists occasionally think something really dumb. :0)

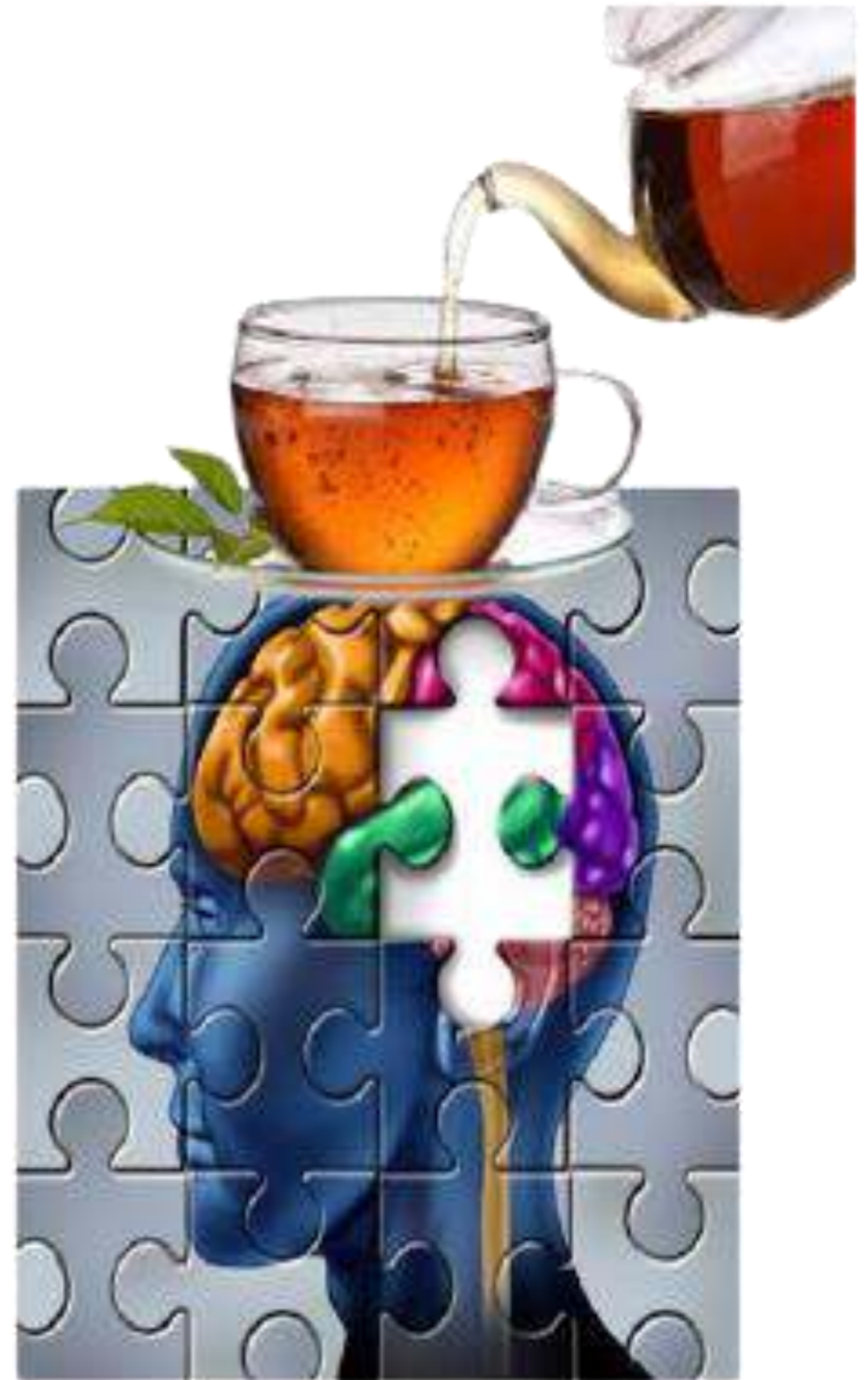


## Burrs For Your Brains?

While we're talking about things that old herbalists said about burdock, some Native American tribes used to use burdock burrs as a tea first thing in the morning to bring back memories of their dreams and improve memory generally.

I've never tried this. I was going to make some burr tea this morning...but I forgot.

If it is true, it's likely due to circulatory improvement to the noggin.



# Burdock & Mucilage

Burdock also contains some mucilage.

Mucilage is a slimy, soothing substance that calms irritated mucus membranes anywhere in the body whether it 's in the gut, the bladder, the throat or the lungs.

If you want the mucilage, you'll do better to do a cold infusion of the root rather than hot. Heat makes mucilage all goobery and gross. It doesn't hurt it, but it's a little tougher to get folks to drink the tea with their eyes open.

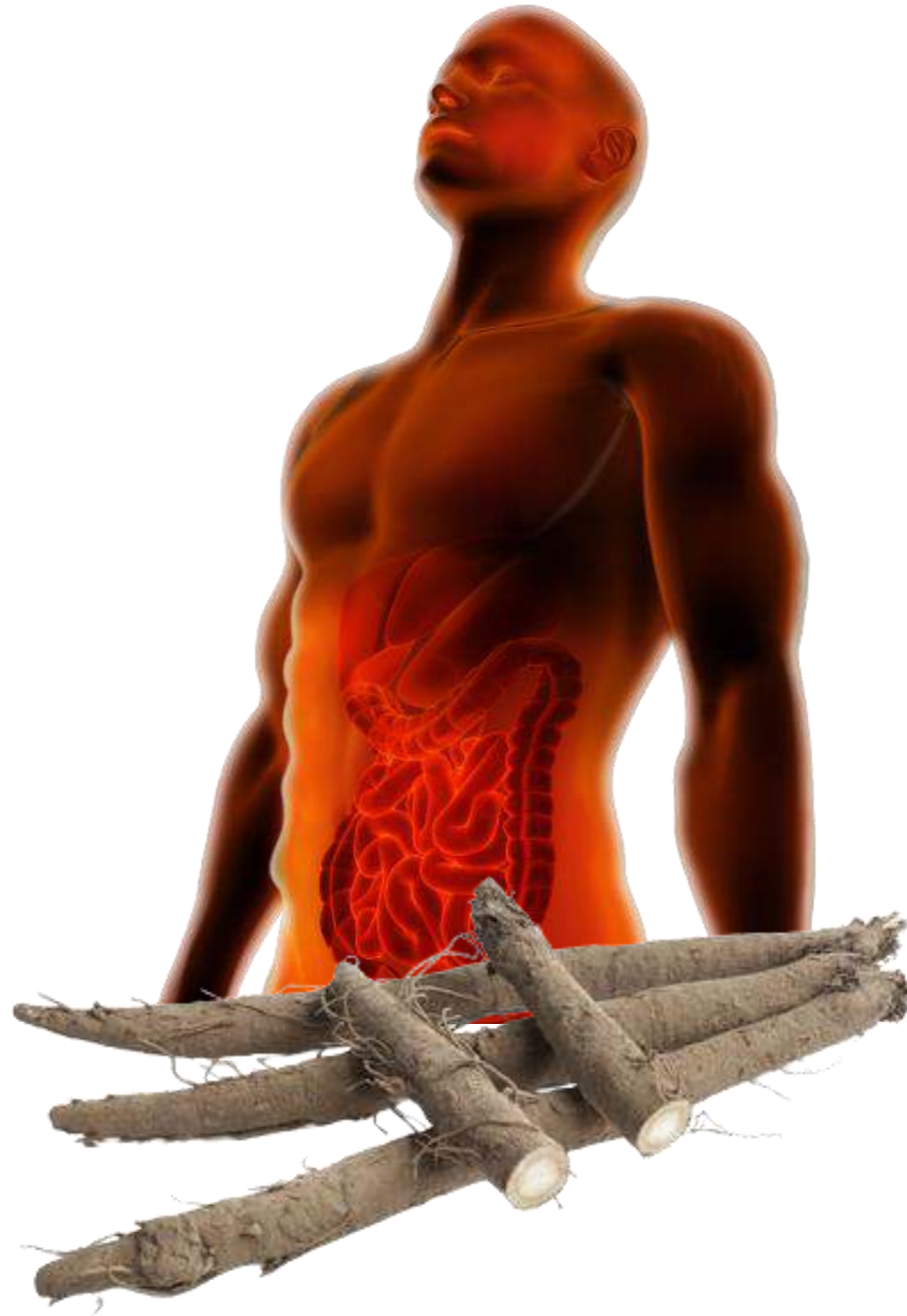


*Marshmallow*

*Most folks looking for mucilage reach for marshmallow. But Burdock has some too.*

# Digestion

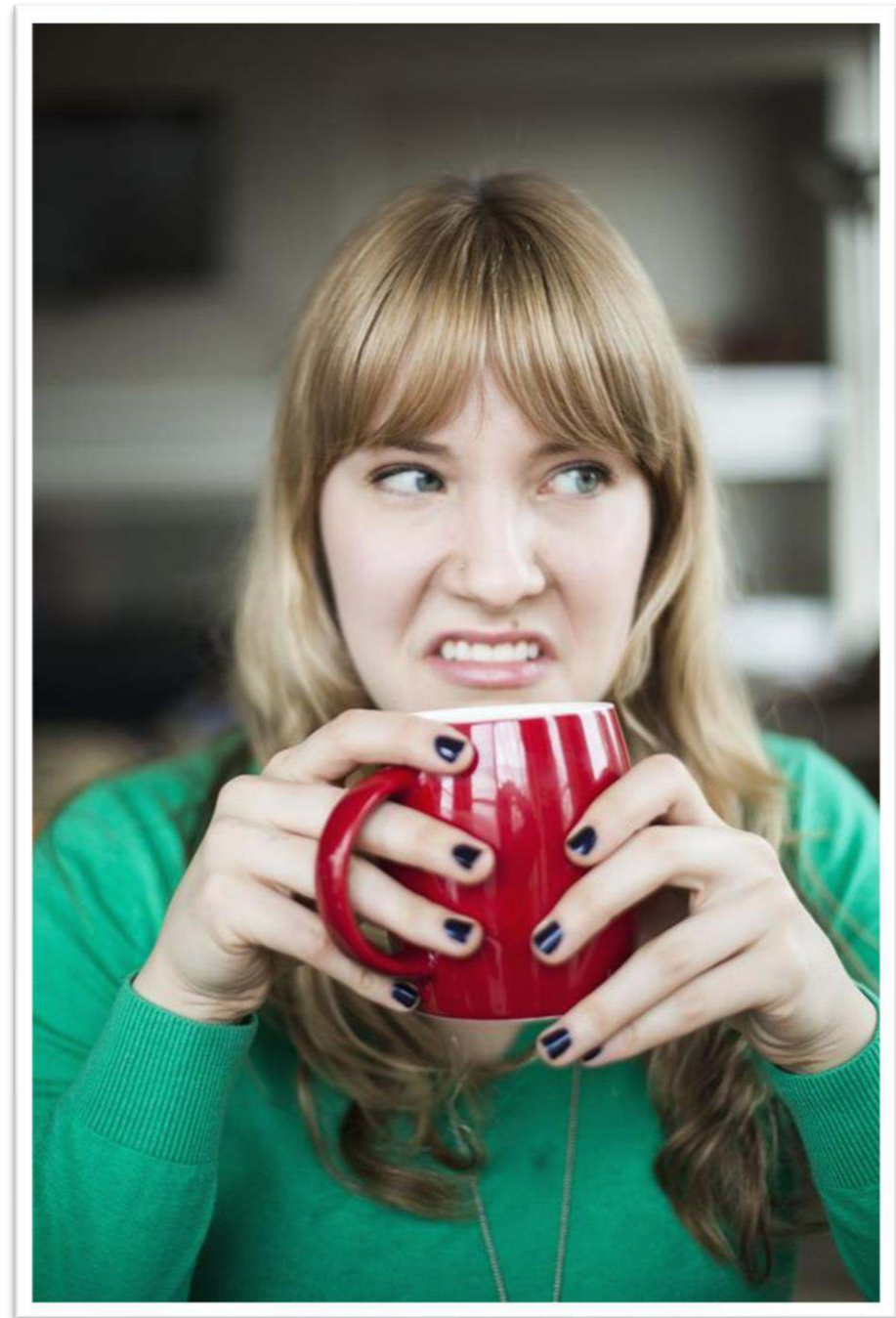
Burdock root increases bile production and flow which helps emulsify and digest fats. It also contains high levels of fiber which is great for moving things through the guts.



# Burdock As A Digestive Bitter

Burdock leaf (unless it's very young) is fairly bitter and can be used as a digestive bitter.

Take a cup full half an hour before eating and you'll be less likely to have indigestion, dyspepsia, heartburn and other stomach ills. Remember not to put sugar in it. If it tastes good it won't work. :0)



# Scurvy

Scurvy is a condition in which Vitamin C is deficient. Since Vitamin C is a major ingredient in making good tissue, one of the early symptoms of scurvy is gum bleeding and tooth loss.

Burdock is a good winter source of Vitamin C. Pine needles and rose hips are great winter sources as well.



# Earache

A tea of the leaf dripped into the ear is purportedly good for earache. I haven't tried this.

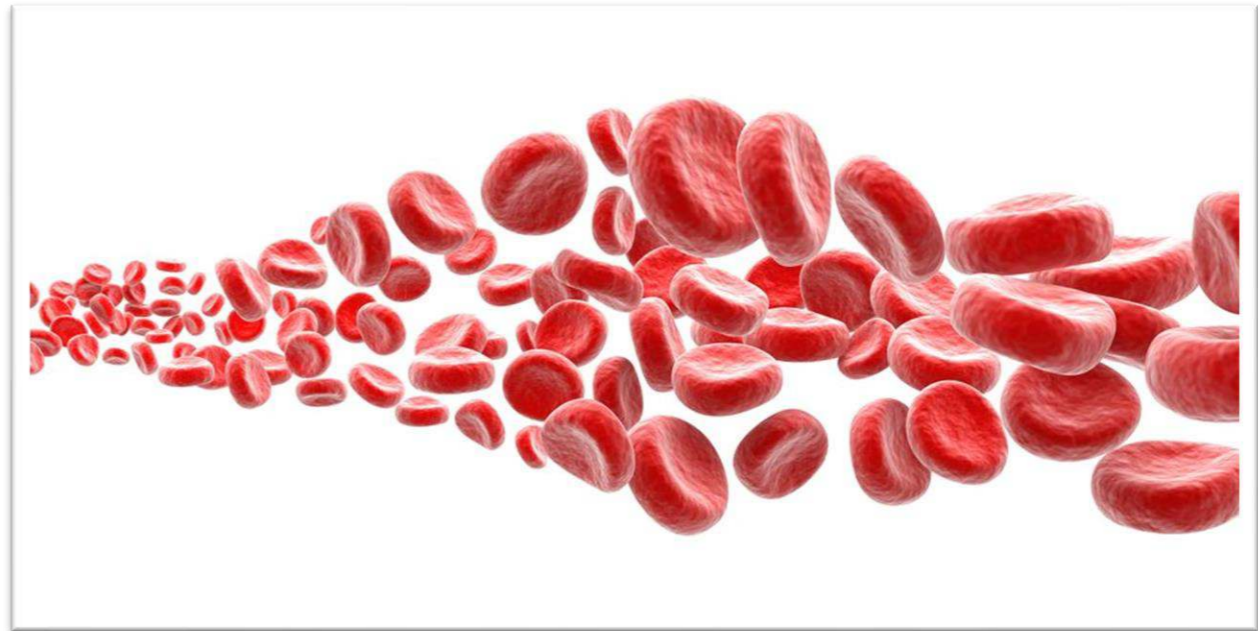
I've always used Onion juice which works beautifully for this and doesn't require finding a burdock plant in the middle of the night when your kid is crying.



# Blood Purifier & Alterative

Burdock has a powerful influence on the kidneys and liver. Since both of these organs are responsible for removing wastes and toxins from the blood, burdock root is a wonderful blood purifier and alterative.

An alterative is an herb that helps the body to transition (alter itself) from a condition of illness to health.



# Burdock & Skin Issues

Burdock root is one of my first choices for eczema, psoriasis, acne, keratosis pilaris and other skin issues. Again the blood-cleansing effect which result from stimulating the liver and kidneys plays a major role in this effect on the skin.

Sometimes skin are slightly worse before they get better. Hang in there for a bit with the burdock and things will turn around soon.



# Leaf Poultice

Leaves and seeds are good topically for skin stuff too.

Boil some water and steep the leaf for a few minutes then wrap it on your rash.

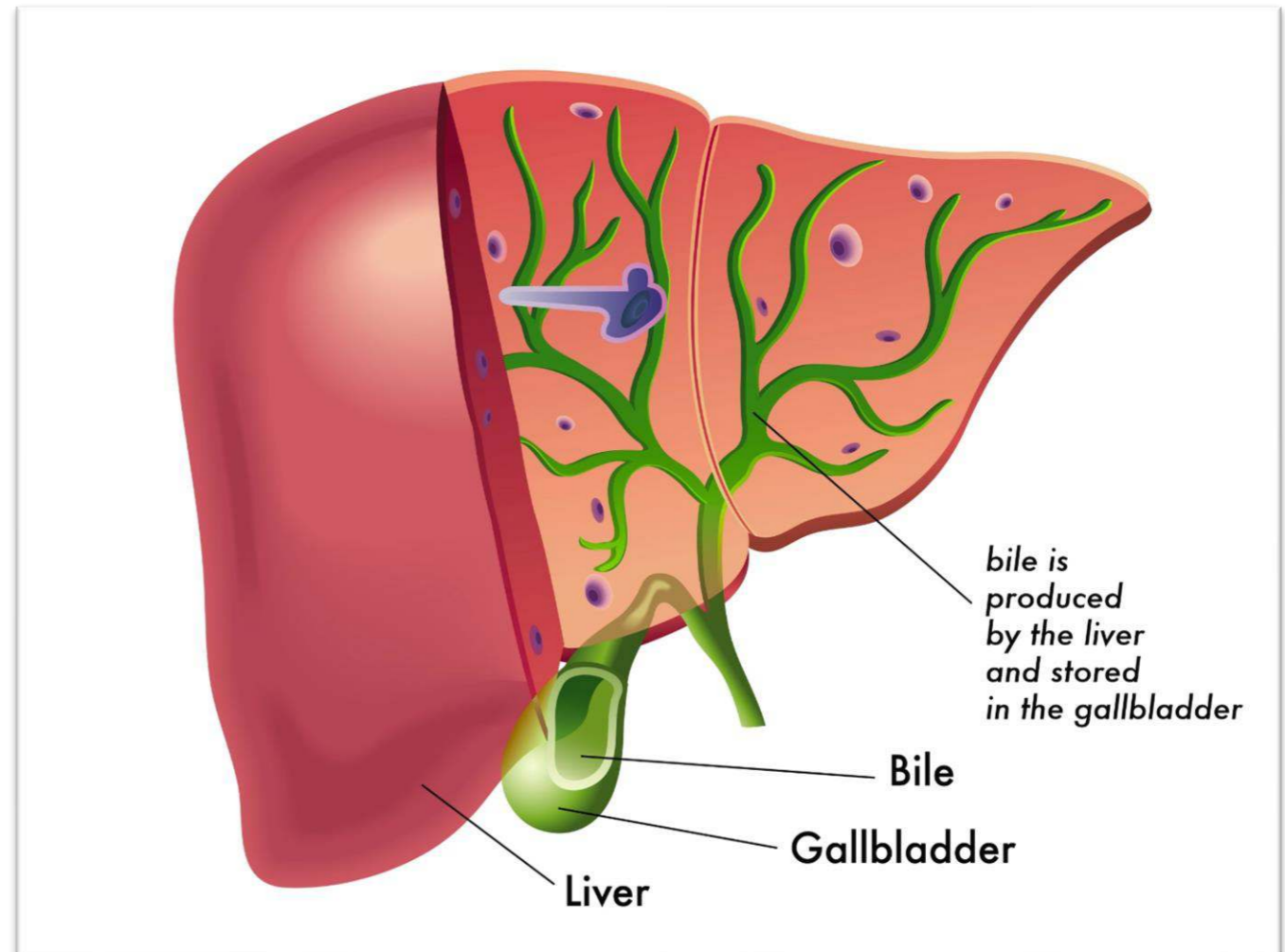
A crushed leaf is good for bug bites and bee stings too as is a strong tea of the leave or seeds used as a wash.



# Burdock & The Liver

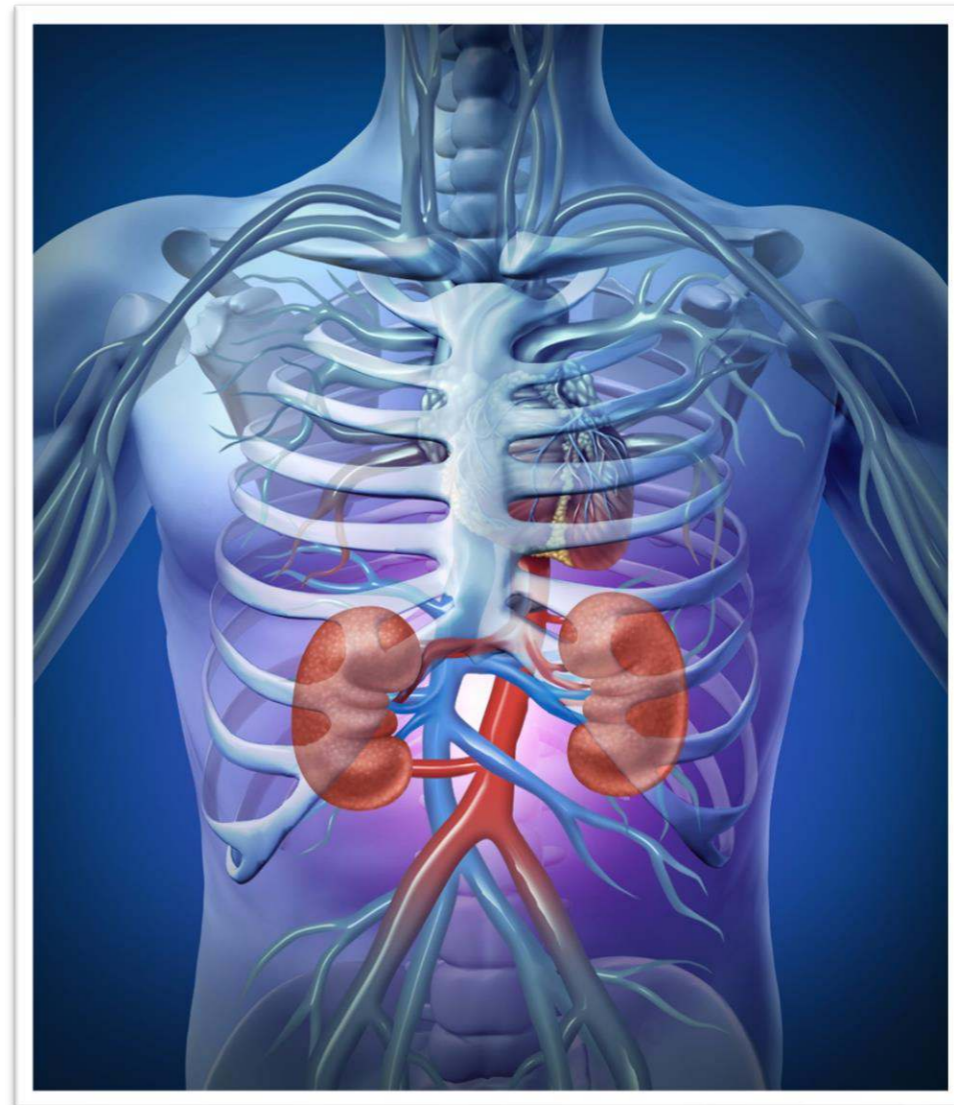
Burdock root is an excellent liver tonic and support. It increases bile production and flow which cleanses the liver and improves its function of detoxifying the rest of the body.

I've used it in formulas for jaundice and hepatitis with amazing results.



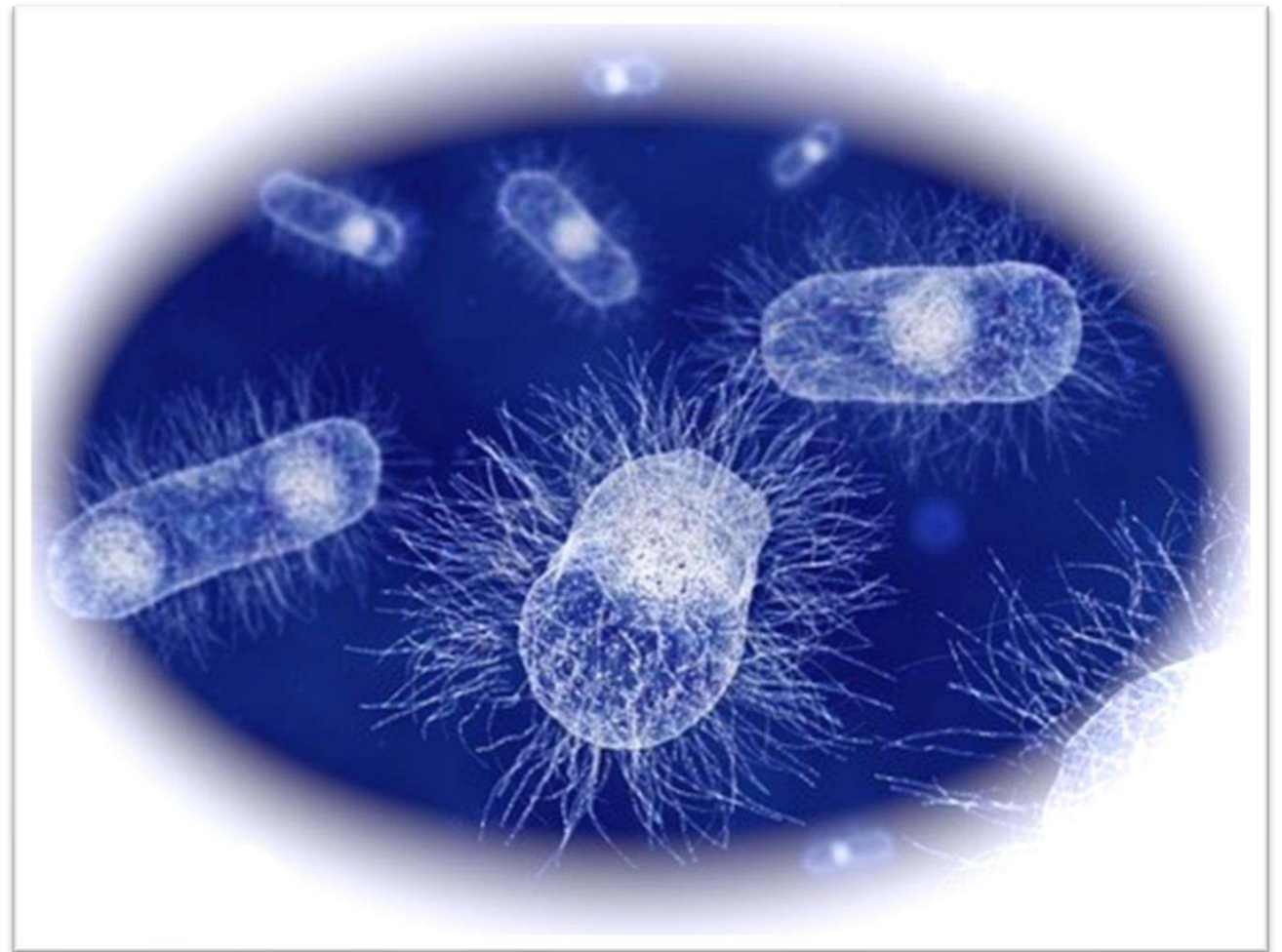
# Burdock & The Kidneys

Burdock is also an excellent diuretic. Diuretics increase urine production. This also cleanses and detoxifies the body. Increased urination also helps to clear up kidney stones and urinary tract infections.



# Burdock & The Gut Flora

Burdock contains a lot of insoluble fiber called inulin. This fiber improves movement of stool through the gut, but, more importantly, it is the favorite food of beneficial bacteria in the gut. These little rascals outnumber our own body cells by about ten to one. They aid in digestion, produce vitamins help the immune system function and even make the nervous system and other organs work better by making serotonin. We should be nice to the little guys.



# Burdock As A Nutritive

Burdock contains an abundance of minerals; iron, Magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, manganese, sodium. IT is also rich in vitamin C and vitamin B6.

In the spring, you can eat the young leaves and stalks. Add them to salads and such. If they're too bitter, boil them and change the water twice to remove the bitterness and eaten like greens. The roots are good too. If they're too old, peel off the outer rim. If they're too bitter, boil them twice with water changes.

Or just throw the powder in your morning smoothie.



## Burdock & The Joints

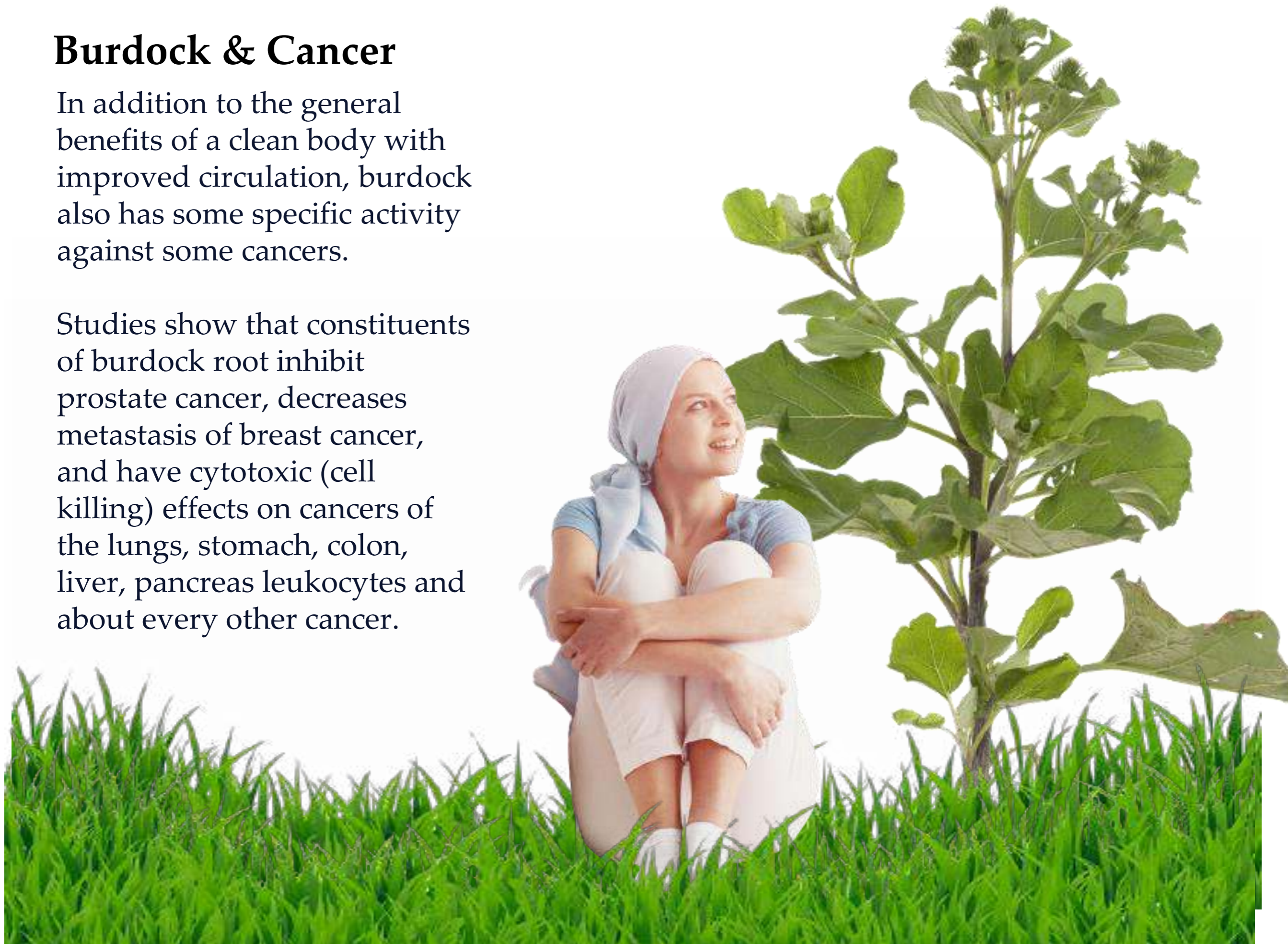
As the blood is cleansed, fewer and fewer contaminants precipitate into the joints to cause inflammation. As a result, burdock root has excellent benefits for arthritis, rheumatism, lumbago, sciatica and other inflammatory joint issues.



# Burdock & Cancer

In addition to the general benefits of a clean body with improved circulation, burdock also has some specific activity against some cancers.

Studies show that constituents of burdock root inhibit prostate cancer, decreases metastasis of breast cancer, and have cytotoxic (cell killing) effects on cancers of the lungs, stomach, colon, liver, pancreas leukocytes and about every other cancer.



# Burdock As A Diaphoretic

A diaphoretic is a plant that breaks a fever by increasing the body temperature slightly and causing a sweat. A warm tea of burdock seed and a hot bath will work well for this.

As I mentioned before, I never use the seed as the work it requires to harvest is a big pain in the neck. Yarrow works very well as a diaphoretic as well and is lots easier to harvest. So that's what I use.



# Burdock As An Aphrodisiac



For centuries, the Chinese have considered burdock to be an aphrodisiac. This is likely to be due to its tonic effects on both the male and female reproductive systems. If the tea doesn't work, try adding a ukulele.

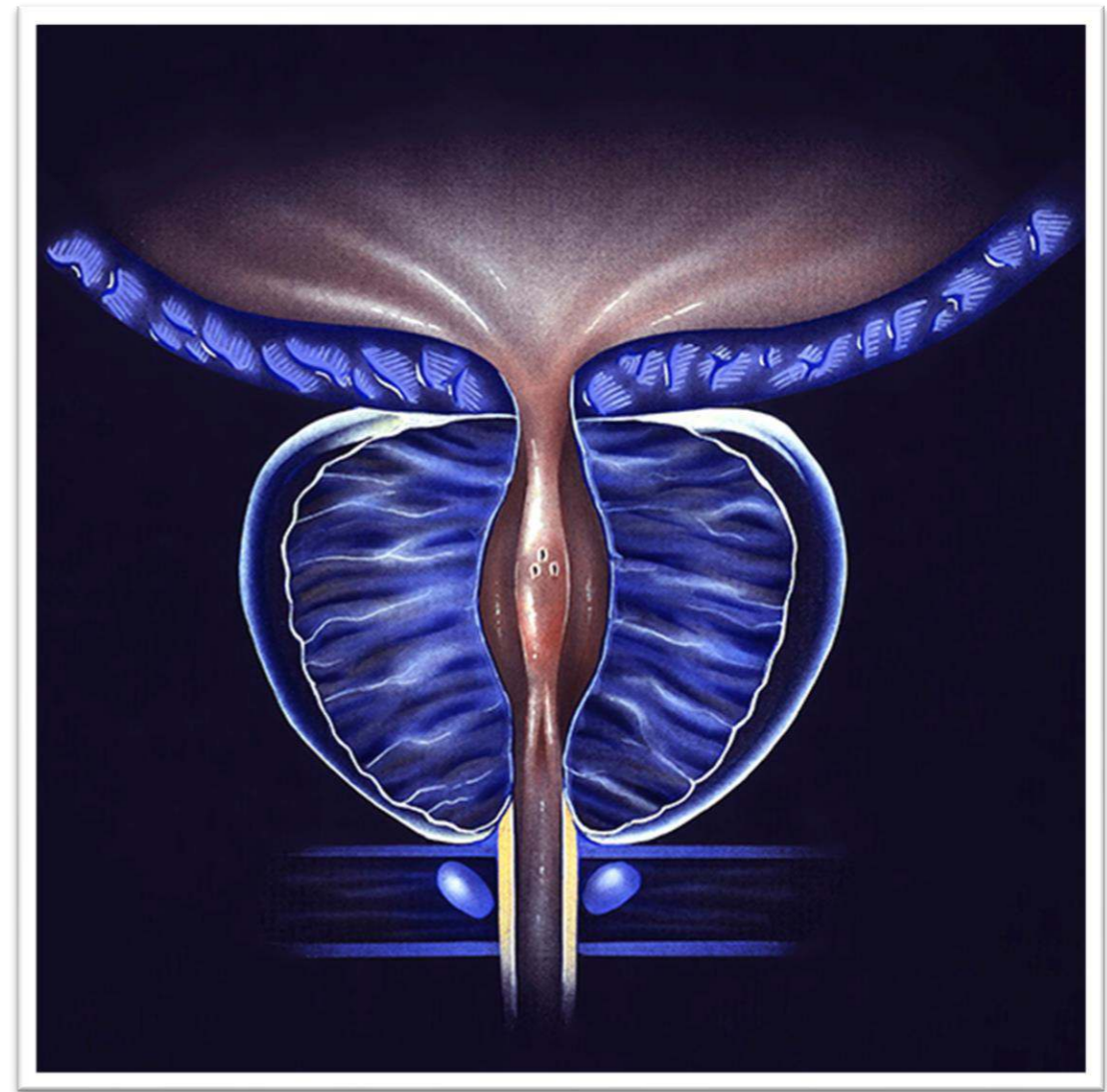
# Burdock & Gout



One of the benefits of burdock root's diuretic functions is the breaking down of down uric acid in the joints to relieve and prevent gout.

# Burdock & The Prostate

Burdock reduces swelling and discomfort of the prostate. And, as mentioned before, it also inhibits replication of prostate cancer cells.



# Burdock Lowers Blood Sugar

Both the root and the seed of burdock can help to lower blood sugars. It can be helpful for folks that are in the early stages of diabetes.

People taking insulin or other medications that lower blood sugar, or people prone to low blood sugar for other reasons, should be careful about using herbs that lower blood sugar as their additive effect to medications they're already taking may lower blood sugars too much and cause problems with hypoglycemia.



## Burdock & Allergies

Burdock root decreases histamine levels in the body by stimulating the liver (the primary organ for eliminating histamines). But that's not all, burdock also inhibits IgE production and release which is another major contributor to allergic symptoms. Adding a little burdock to your allergy formula is a great idea.



# Summary

Burdock root is an astoundingly beneficial herb with no real contraindications. It can be taken as a daily tonic and will be a blessing to about every organ and tissue in your body.

It's easy to grow, tastes good and is an excellent addition to about any herbal formula.

If you have a body, you should be taking it all the time.

# Shameless Commercial Announcement

Click Here for:

[\*Doc's Burdock\*](#)  
[Formulas](#)



# The HomeGrown Herbalist School of Botanical Medicine

Yup, You Want to Enroll!



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# Thanks For Listening!



Dr. Patrick Jones & Carl The Herb Hound

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# The HomeGrown Herbalist

*School of Botanical Medicine*



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