

PLANTAIN: A COMMON BUT “WONDROUS” WEED INDEED!

By Rebecca L. Montrone, B.S. - Wondrous Roots, Inc.
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I know, I'll bet most of you are thinking about bananas when plantains are mentioned, but the plantain I speak of is found right in your own backyard! *Plantago major*, otherwise known as common plantain, is that weed in your backyard that competes – or perhaps conspires – with the dandelion to take over your lawn.

My introduction to the wonders of common plantain happened quite by accident. We were living in southern Connecticut at the time, and it was early summer. One day my husband Dale was bitten by a spider behind his left knee. It was painful when it happened, but we didn't think too much of it after the initial incident. A few weeks later, however, upon returning from the *International Herb Symposium* at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, I noticed that the skin was reddened in a ring around the bite, and the skin was beginning to chafe. It was bothering him, too. Although a “bullseye rash” is a classic symptom of a deer-tick bite, and we had plenty of those where we were living, we knew he had been bitten by a spider when it happened.

I quickly went to the “web” to see what I might be able to learn. His bite had the characteristics of a brown recluse bite, and the prognosis for those nasty bites was disturbing, to say the least! I read of persistent, stubborn sores that progressed in severity and size, treated with intravenous antibiotics, etc., and many times leading to the amputation of arms or legs. Yikes. I didn't share this information with Dale!

Searching for a ‘miraculous’ botanical alternative treatment over the worldwide web yielded nothing. Then, I remembered I had purchased a book at the conference I had just attended, *The Book of Herbal Wisdom* by Matthew Wood, a western herbalist I have long admired and whose lectures I attend whenever possible. Wouldn't you know, in the book he told a story of a woman who had been on a walk with an herbalist who pointed out the use of common plantain for insect bites, asserting that even the black widow bite could be successfully treated if the chewed leaves were applied. Sometime later, this same woman was out in a garden with two of her friends when they stumbled into a black widow nest. All were bitten. Upon returning home, the woman remembered the words of the herbalist regarding plantain and did as she had advised. The next day her two friends were dead. She was fine (was this before email... or *telephones* for that matter?).

So... I hustled off to *Wild Oats* and purchased a liquid extract of plantain. I instructed Dale to rub it on the bite topically a few times a day and to take a few droppersful by mouth a few times a day. After the first day the bite began to subside and quickly healed.

An anecdote, to be sure! But then I had another opportunity to try it. A few years later, back in New Hampshire, I attended my women's Bible study at Windham Presbyterian Church on Thursday morning, as I was in the habit of doing. I missed a woman from our group and inquired regarding her absence. “Didn't you hear?? She was bitten by a

spider, hospitalized, treated by infectious disease..." etc., all to no avail. Sent home, her knee was so swollen she couldn't walk, and she was in a great deal of pain.

Hmm... the wheels started to turn. Here was the very opportunity I had been waiting for! By this time I had started making my own medicinal herbal extracts, and I had plenty of plantain extract at home. I gave some to one of her close friends with instructions. The next week she was back at Bible study. Not knowing what to expect, as casually as I could, I asked how it went with the plantain experiment. "It was instantaneous," my guinea pig replied, "...I rubbed it all over the knee area the first night before I went to bed, and when I woke up in the morning the swelling was completely gone; all that was left was a small, red dot!"

Incidentally plantain's extraordinary drawing power is largely responsible for its miraculous action on insect bites, and it can be applied to other conditions that require powerful drawing, such as splinters, ticks, you name it! Not bad for a humble, oh-so-common weed!