

DR. CHRISTOPHER'S  
*Herbal Legacy Newsletter*

## St. John's Wort – *Hypericum perforatum*



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### History

St. John's Wort (SJW) has a 2400 year history from ancient Greece. The name Hypericum is derived from Greek "hyper" meaning above and "eikon" meaning picture. This refers to a practice of placing flowers above religious images to keep away evil. This practice was usually performed on Midsummer day the 24th of June, St. John's day. The name perforatum refers to the

tiny oil gland perforations on the underside of the leaves.

For many the perforated leaves came to symbolize the wounds of martyrs. Others saw the plant's ability to take solar power and store it in these red droplets, like life's blood in our physical bodies. SJW allows the powers of light to penetrate into the plant so completely that the powers of light can be passed directly on to us. SJW helps us to open ourselves to lightness when our spirits are heavy and everything seems dark.

The plant blooms midsummer around June 24th - John the Baptist's birthday. The oozing red oil from the crushed flower is associated with the blood of the martyred St John. Wort means plant or herb. Legend says the plant sprang up from St. John's blood when he was beheaded.

Legend also says the SJW protects against witches spells or the "evil eye." An old English saying related by Christopher Hobbs states:

*St Johns wort doth charm all the witches away.  
If gathered at midnight on the Saints holy day.  
And devils and witches have no power to harm  
Those that do gather the plant for a charm.  
Rub the lintels and post with that red juicy flower  
No thunder nor tempest will then have the power  
To hurt or to hinder your houses; and bind  
Round your neck a charm of similar kind.*

As the poem indicates SJW was used in many different divination practices. To illustrate just a few; young girls would dance around a bon fire on the night of St John (June 24th) with crowns braided in their hair made of the flowering plant. Then they would throw small twigs of the dried plant into water and read the way the blossoms reanimated to predict whether they would marry in the following year.

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People would put flowers under their pillow on Midsummer Eve (June 23rd) to protect themselves from powers of evil. Also according to legend St John would appear to them in a dream and give his blessing and provide protection from death to the person for the next year.

SJW is considered the most beautiful sun plant, filled with solar energy and thereby associated with benevolent spirits. People use it to chase away evil and darkness. Peasants hung it in the stables to protect livestock from sorcery and placed small tufts in their windows to keep evil spirits from entering.

Physical characteristics of the plant give clues to medicinal properties. Paracelsus wrote in Doctrine of Signatures “the holes in the leaves mean the herb helps in all inner and outer orifices of the skin. The bloom rot on the form of blood, a sign that it is good for wounds and should be used where flesh has to be treated.”

## Location & Description

SJW is native to Europe and spread to other continents via European settlers. It is classified as a weed in many countries. It grows along roadsides, field and waste ground. SJW prefers well drained to dry soil, in sun or partial shade.

Leaves are simple and opposite, oval to linear in shape and have small translucent dots under the surface. Running your fingers along the stem, you can feel two fine longitudinal ridges (related species have 4 ridges). The stem is too hard to just pick, you have to cut it or pull up the roots. The delicate yellow flowers appear from June to August, have 5 petals with tiny, almost imperceptible black dots along their margins. These dots are the glands that contain the plant's essential oil. A mass of yellow stamens protrude from their centers. The flower produces so much pollen that pollinating insects revel in it.

When the flowers are rubbed between the fingers, the dark dots around the edges exude a juice or oil as red as blood and when the leaves are held up to the sun, they appear to be perforated with needles. These holes are actually transparent oil glands.

SJW is propagated from root divisions taken in the spring or fall. It will reproduce from seed as well. There is no known medicinal value in the roots.

Next week we will discuss the medicinal qualities of SJW.

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