

Medicinal

Common name Butterbur or Umbrella Plant

Latin Name *Petasites Vulgaris*

Family name Compositae

The Butterbur puts out its flowers before the leaves appear. The flower-heads are crowned clusters in a dense spike, with many bracts (leaf like structures) interspersed, at the summit of a round, thick flower-stalk, which can differ in size from 4 inches to a little over a foot in height. The flower first appears at the beginning of March and is generally of a purplish pink colour.



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In Butterburs there are two kinds of flowers - the male or stamen-bearing and the female or seed producing, usually on different spikes. The female flowers are on denser, longer spikes than the male flowers.

In April, as the flowers begin to die down, the leaves appear. They are on stout stalks and become the largest leaves of any plant in Great Britain. They sometimes get to 3 feet in diameter. The leaves are roundish, heart-shaped at the base and scalloped at the edges, with the portion between the projections finely toothed. The leaves are white and cobwebby with down both above and below when young. When mature, most of the covering disappears from the upper surface, though the leaves still remain grey and more or less downy underneath.



Butter bur Leaf © BBC

Because of the size of these gigantic leaves no other plant can live where they grow, as they exclude all light and air from beneath them.

The name Butterbur is supposed to have arisen because the large leaves were used to wrap butter in during hot weather.

What it was used for in the past?

The seeds in some parts of the country have been used for love divination. 'The seeds of butterdock must be sowed by a young unmarried woman half an hour before sunrise on a Friday morning, in a lonesome place. She must strew the seeds gradually on the grass, saying these words:

"I sow, I sow!
Then, my own dear,
Come here, come here,
And mow and mow!"

The seed being scattered, she will see her future husband mowing with a scythe at a short distance from her. She must not be frightened, for if she says, "Have mercy on me," he will immediately vanish! This method is said to be infallible.' Butterbur root was used as a heart stimulant, acting both as a cardiac tonic and also as a diuretic.



It has been in use as a remedy in fevers, the plague, asthma, colds and urinary complaints.

Sources

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