



# HerbClip™

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**FILE: ■ Italian Phytomedicine**  
**■ Italian Folk Medicine**  
**■ Botanical Medicine: Italy**

**HC 040253-286**

**Date: August 15, 2005**

**RE: Survey of Botanical Medicine Use in Central Italy**

Guarrera, PM. Traditional phytotherapy in Central Italy (Marche, Abruzzo, and Latium). *Fitoterapia*. 2005; 76:1–25.

Botanical medicine has a rich history in most countries and has continued to evolve alongside modern medicine. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 75% of the world's population relies on botanical medicines as their primary form of medicine.<sup>1</sup> The author of the current article sought to catalog plant-based folk medicine by interviewing more than 300 people, most of them elderly, in 175 localities in the Central Italy regions of Marche, Abruzzo, and Latium between the years 1997 and 2000.

Data were gathered on the common name of the plants, ways of preparing the medicines, how the medicines were administered, therapeutic properties, and the conditions (human and veterinary) for which the plants were used. Plants samples were also collected.

More than 200 plants were described, and the article discusses 80 of these, which were distributed among 36 plant families. The phytotherapeutic use of these plants is still known mostly among the elderly. Medicines were made by simple plant preparations, such as infusions (steeping leaves in hot water), decoctions (boiling roots or bark in water), and macerations (processing the plant parts by grinding or pounding them in water or oil). A wide range of disorders are treated with these medicines, including gastrointestinal complaints, rheumatic and respiratory diseases, and skin conditions such as burns and wounds.

Three wild, spontaneous plants still primarily used today are high mallow (*Malva sylvestris*) for poultices and toothaches, stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) for gastrointestinal disorders, and European elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) for wounds. Other plants considered for their medicinal application are elm leaf (*Rubus ulmifolius*) for wounds, garlic (*Allium sativum*) for helminthiasis, and figs (*Ficus carica*) for respiratory diseases. Pellitory-of-the-wall (*Parietaria judaica* syn *P. diffusa*), growing in extensive proliferation in Central Italy, addresses contusions and sprains. Field elm (*Ulmus minor*) acts as a hemostatic, while

Canadian thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) acts as an emergency hemostatic. The 80 plants discussed in this article are included in a table that lists their formulations and traditional uses.

Knowledge of the traditional uses of plants continues to decrease. Such comprehensive studies as this one provides are crucial to preserving these valuable practices. These traditional formulas can be used to expand our knowledge of the medicinal actions of plants, many of which continue to be used in clinical medicine today.

—John Neustadt, ND

## References

<sup>1</sup>Farnsworth NR, Akerele O, Bingel AS, Soejarto DD, Guo Z. Medicinal plants in therapy. *Bull World Health Organ.* 1985;63(6):965-981.

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