



The Herb Society of America's Notable Naturalized Herb 2026 ***Hypericum perforatum*, L.**



H. perforatum, submitted by Susan Betz

Family: Hypericaceae

Latin Name: *Hypericum perforatum*, L.

Common Name: St. John's Wort

Growth: Perennial, 1' to 3' tall

Hardiness: Grows in all states except AL, AZ, UT

Light: Full sun, can handle some shade

Soil: Moderately dry soil (grasslands, open woods)

Uses: History of use for medicinal purposes

Propagation: Seed, stem cuttings

CONSERVATION STATUS:

Non-native, therefore not ranked

HISTORY

The genus *Hypericum* contains about 400 species found worldwide, including 60 species **naturalized** in North America. These plants range from herbs to shrubs to trees, each with different flowering times and growing needs. St. John's Wort has a rich mystical history reflected in both its scientific and common names, surrounded by ancient superstitions. The name *Hypericum* is derived from Greek, with "hyper" meaning "above" and "eikon" meaning "image", referring to the medieval practice of hanging the leaves and flowers above icons. An alternative definition "above an apparition" was based on the belief that this herb was so repulsive to evil spirits that its scent alone would make them flee. A pleasing

fragrance is not considered one of its attributes. Wort historically denotes plants used for healing ailments.

The flowers of St. John's Wort, which resemble miniature suns, typically bloom around the summer solstice, an important seasonal event in many cultures. Its unique association with the sun and the changing seasons adds a layer of ancient mystique to the plant's connection with St. John the Baptist. This connection stems from the Christian calendar, which designates June 24, Midsummer, as the feast day of the saint, linking this long-revered plant to this significant time of year.

DESCRIPTION

St. John's Wort is an upright perennial with multiple branches on a stem that can reach 3' tall. First brought to this country in 1696, it is native to Europe, western Asia, and northern Africa. The plants have spread across our country except for AL, AZ, and UT. It boasts a charming display of bright yellow flowers, each of which has 5 petals with tiny black dots along the edges, a pistil with 3 styles, and many yellow stamens. The yellow-green oblong leaves are dotted with black dots on the margins, and translucent dots scattered throughout. The leaves have an aroma described as "unpleasant" when bruised. The plant flowers near the summer solstice in mid June and remains through most of the summer. The plant is described as deciduous or evergreen, depending on location and water.

Many plants produce from 25 to 100 flowers per stem. Some of those stems can be reddish toward the base.

The plants develop a tap root that can work its way from 2' to 5' below the surface. They are prepared to stay where they grow!

USES

St. John's Wort is an herb which has been used medicinally for centuries. Historically, it had a variety of uses. Among the uses, ancient Greek and Romans recommended it for sciatica and burns. It was also used as an amulet against spells and apparitions. In the Middle Ages, it was gathered in bunches and burned in houses to keep demons and evil spirits away. Native Americans used it for several conditions including healing wounds, treat snakebites and nosebleeds.

St. John's Wort is an herbal supplement which is widely available in a number of forms, including tablets, tinctures, teas, ointments, gels, and lotions.



St. John's Wort, Susan Betz.

St. John's Wort is one of nearly 400 species, twenty-five of them now found in the U.S., where seven states have declared them noxious weeds.

Since it is considered a dietary supplement by the FDA it is not subject to the standards required for medications.

Researchers have conducted a number of studies and clinical trials to test its effectiveness in the treatment of a variety of conditions. St John's Wort contains hypericin, a chemical that may contribute to its effectiveness, as well as hyperforin and flavonoids. It has antibacterial, antidepressant and antioxidant effects, among others. It is most commonly used to treat mild to moderate depression with a number of clinical trials finding that it is helpful, although not all studies agree about its

effectiveness. It is not considered effective for severe depression or bipolar depression.

St. John's Wort is used for a number of other conditions, but studies have been inconclusive about its effectiveness. Extracts of the herb are sometimes used as a topical remedy for wounds, abrasions, burns and muscle pain. In addition to psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression, it has also been used for treating nerve pain such as neuralgia and sciatica. Other clinical trials suggest it may be beneficial to treat mood symptoms of menopause and premenstrual syndrome, for obsessive compulsive disorder and for seasonal affective disorders. It may take several weeks to notice any benefit.



H. perforatum capsules

PROPAGATION

St. John's Wort propagates itself naturally and readily from both seeds and rhizomes.

Seeds sprinkled lightly on soil should be barely pressed in (as they would fall naturally) and kept moist by misting or spraying until they germinate. Once germinated they should be moved outdoors right away or placed under strong grow lights, if not already growing out of doors. Once they are a few inches tall, the seedlings are ready for transplanting.

Hypericum may also be propagated by 6-inch-long stem cuttings. Once the lower leaves are

Possible side effects include anxiety, dizziness, dry mouth, headache, light sensitivity, restlessness, sedation, sexual dysfunction, skin reactions, stomach upset, tiredness or fatigue.

Warnings: St. John's Wort should not be used to treat severe depression or bipolar depression. St. John's Wort can have dangerous effects when combined with other medications. It should not be taken by people taking certain medications, since it can make some of them less effective or potentiate the effect of others. It may increase the effect of SSRI antidepressants, which can cause a hazardous increase in serotonin. In some cases, it can trigger psychosis. It should not be used during pregnancy or breastfeeding. Because it can have serious and even life-threatening consequences, prior to using St. John's Wort, one should always consult his/her physician to determine if it is contraindicated.

removed, the cutting should rest for a few days for the stem "wound" to heal. Dipping the cut end in rooting hormone can shorten this process. The cutting should be planted directly in its permanent growing place and the soil kept moist until it has enough roots to resist a gentle pull.

Growing St. John's Wort in a container helps prevent spreading by rhizomes, although it will need to be repotted often. The new container should be one or two sizes larger than the plant. It and the soil should be well draining.

POLLINATORS

Bees, including bumblebees and sweat bees, are the primary pollinators of St. John's Wort, which

provides abundant pollen. Hoverflies, or syrphid flies are also frequently spotted on the flowers, along with a variety of random beetles.

St. John's Wort

In the valleys of the Tyrol,
When the twilight waxes dim,
And the elves are all exorcised
By the tender vesper-hymn;

When the grim Walpurgis witches,
Balder's host, are lying dead,—
Then they whisper tale and legend,
Half in earnest, half in dread,

Of the dim St. John's wort shining
Through one mystic summer night—
Of its branch across the doorway,
Barring elfin curse and blight;

Whisper, too, a pleasant story,
That its leaves within the shoe
Thus can make a journey tireless,
Though its leagues be not a few.

~ Ethel Lynn Beers (1827-1879)

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