

ORGANIC LIVING

By

Robert Rodale

COMFREY: THE VERSATILE HERB

Americans in record numbers are rediscovering the charm and lore of herbs. Starting your own kitchen herb garden is now the trendy "in" thing among apartment dwellers in New York and other major cities. And suburbanites and others with land are planting herbs outdoors for the same reasons: herbs add taste excitement to foods, and carry with them an aura of old-fashioned "home remedy" folklore.

Comfrey is a good example of an easy-to-grow, health-giving herb that also has practical value on the farm. Country folk of England have used it to speed the healing of broken bones at least since medieval times. Other Europeans use comfrey poultices on open wounds, burns, insect bites and other skin irritations. And a tea made from comfrey leaves and roots is taken for intestinal disorders.

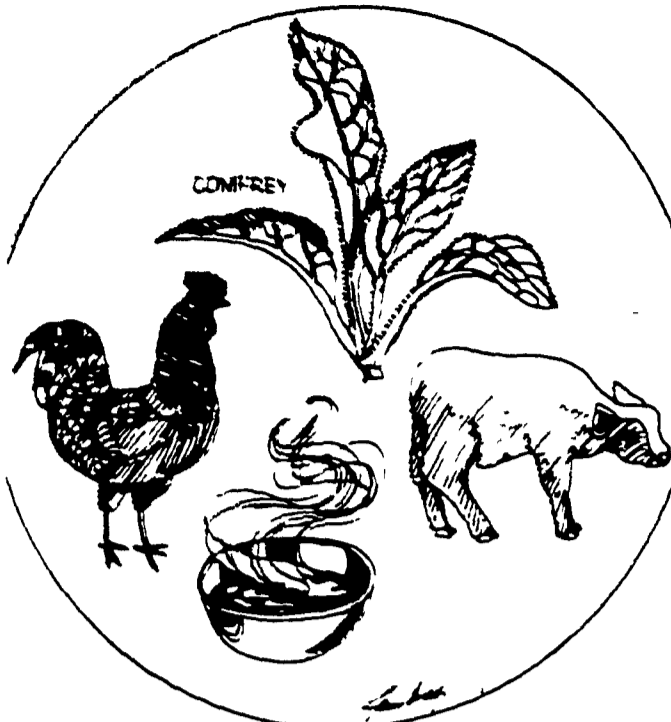
Comfrey's reputation has a basis in scientific fact, not superstition. Early in this century, British physician Charles J. Macalister succeeded in isolating comfrey's healing component, allantoin. That substance has since become part of the pharmacist's arsenal because of its ability to heal wounds, cuts and lacerations while inducing healthy new tissue growth. Taken internally, it helps cure ulcers and intestinal irritations.

Comfrey has more going for it than just allantoin, however. Its leaves contain vitamins A, C and E, as well as the B vitamin complex. Unlike other vegetation, comfrey even contains some B12, the anti-anemia vitamin usually found only in meat products. Because its roots dig down deep into the subsoil (eight feet or more), comfrey is a rich source of minerals, including iron, manganese, potassium, copper and zinc.

That makes comfrey an excellent food for livestock as well. Smart farmers add a concentrate of comfrey to their poultry and calf feed because it is rich in calcium and phosphorus. It is also richer in protein than most plants, containing almost 8 percent more protein than alfalfa.

Comfrey leaves are a good soil builder. Chopped and disked into the soil, they make an excellent green manure. Gardeners find them a perfect ingredient for the compost heap. And British municipal composting dumps grow comfrey to use in their heaps to keep the other materials from binding together and rotting imperfectly.

English agronomist and comfrey expert Lawrence D. Hills



describes the plant as "a mine of potash and phosphate," two vital soil-building elements.

You can buy comfrey at a health food store, either as chopped roots or dried tea leaves. But if you have even the smallest plot of garden, it would be more fun to grow your own.

Comfrey is a great producer, although it does not set seed, and must be propagated from root cuttings. Both suitable roots and already-started plants are available from mail order houses. The plant grows quickly to about three feet in height, with large rough leaves that can be harvested at least five times during the growing season. One plant in the corner of the garden will supply the average family.

Here are some of the ways comfrey can be put to use:
TEA. Most people know of comfrey as comfrey tea. Take four small fresh leaves, cut them up and steep them in a teapot just as you would any other tea.

Some people complain that the tea tastes like weeds, but others drink it cheerfully for its value as a gentle, effective healing agent. If you don't like the taste, try mixing the comfrey with all kinds of mint and herb teas, either fresh or dried.

SALADS. Pick the youngest, most tender leaves for raw eating, as comfrey is a prickly type of plant. Shred the young leaves very fine and mix with the other salad greens.

COOKED GREENS. For centuries, Europeans cooked comfrey leaves and ate them just as we do spinach or beet greens. Cook them your favorite way, in a very small amount of water. Or just add a comfrey leaf or two to any of your family's favorite cooked greens.

SOUPS. Roll up a few comfrey leaves very tightly and place them in a soup or stew that is cooking. Before serving, lift the roll out, knowing that you have added minerals to your food.

DRIED. You can preserve comfrey for future use by washing the leaves and drying them dry, shredding them with kitchen shears and exposing them to the sun. They can also be dried at low heat in the oven. Then pulverize the leaves with a rolling pin or a mortar and pestle, and store as a fine powder in glass jars for winter use in salads.

"Help Is on the Way" is a 46-page booklet that will answer your questions about growing things organically whether it's delicate herbs or your own garden vegetables. To get a copy, send fifty cents to Robert Rodale, Organic Living, in care of this newspaper. Please ask for the booklet by name and allow four weeks for delivery.

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Ressler is Retiring From New Holland



Robert L. Ressler

Robert L. Ressler, vice president for Manufacturing at Sperry New Holland for the past 26 years, will retire from the company on May 3, it was announced today by Kenneth F. Thompson, company president.

Ressler, who is taking early retirement, plans to purchase and operate a machine tool rebuilding business.

Ressler was born in Earl Township, Lancaster County, where he attended school. At the age of 14, he began working as an apprentice machinist for New Holland Machine Company which at that time manufactured gasoline engines, rock crushers and other farm and quarry machinery. He left the company in 1933, returning as machine shop foreman on August 17, 1942, soon after the company had been reorganized to manufacture the automatic hay baler. He later became plant manager at New Holland. In 1948, he was named vice president in charge of all company

manufacturing operations, and in 1969 was appointed to a world-wide manufacturing staff.

A member of St. Stephens United Church of Christ (Reformed), New Holland, he is married to the former Beatrice Richwine of New Holland. They reside at RD2 New Holland, and have two children, James and Roberta Lee.

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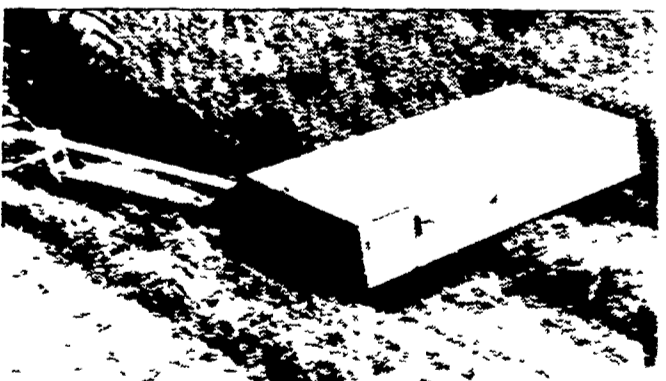
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