This is an excerpt from ***Beyond Tinctures and Tea Cups*, herbal healing from the homestead**.

Comfrey – *Symphytum officinale*

Common Name and Scientific Name:

Comfrey, Knitbone, Knitback, Consound,

Symphytum officinale (Common Comfrey), *Symphytum uplandicum* (Russian Comfrey)

Physical characteristics:

Comfrey is a hardy, invasive plant with hairy leaves and stems. It can reach as much as 3 feet in height and one clump can expand to fill a 12 feet space, through root runners. Comfrey's hairy leaves are oval to lance shaped. The leaves form thick rosettes that lay upon the ground in a thick mat. The flowers stand well above the leaves, on juicy stems. They are bell-shaped, and form in clusters of violet to pink or white. The root is thick and spreading — sending up a new plant from just a piece of stem.

It is from the same family as borage and has the characteristic green-cooling cucumber scent.

Historical information:

Comfrey is well known since ancient times as a wound healer. It is a common barnyard plant, used as a nutritive herb by most livestock.

Growing range:

It grows throughout North America and can be found spreading in abandoned farm yards. It flourishes on moist ground and along the edges of creeks and streams.

Parts Used:

Leaf and root, fresh and dried. The leaves should be gathered anytime during the growing season. These can be oil-infused, tinctured, or dried quickly in the shade. The roots should be dug up in the spring or autumn, when the allantoin levels are high. Split the root down the centre and dry at low temperatures (below 140F).

Cultivation and Wildcrafting tips:

Comfrey is one of the easiest herbs to grow. A small piece of root left in the ground will form a new plant. It is readily self-sowing and can be multiplied by root division. Consider carefully where you plant it. Once it is established it is very difficult to eradicate from a garden. It is well liked by livestock and as the time comes to divide it, consider planting somewhere chickens and goats can free range on it. Protect it while it becomes established and then allow them access. They will only eat what they need.

Primary Constituents:

Allantoin; Pyrrolizidine alkaloids, including echimidine, symphytine, lycopsamine, symlandine. (note: according to Fritchey, the alkoloids are found in the fresh young leaves and in the root, but were absent from the dried herb.)Phenolic acids including rosmarinic chlorogenic, caffeic, and lithospermic acids; Muscilage, composed of a polysaccharide containing glucose and fructose; and small amounts of asparagine, volatile oil, tannins, steroidal saponins, and tritpenes. (Fritchey 132; Hoffman 586)

Action:

Mucilaginous, vulnerary, demulcent, anti-inflammatory, anti-psoriatic, astringent, expectorant, anti-tumour, anti-mutagenic, cell proliferant, nutritive, hemostatic.

Body Systems affected:

Bones and muscle, respiratory system, mucus membranes, stomach and digestive system, skin, blood purifier, gall bladder, inflamed kidneys, irritable bowel, colitis, calcium deficiency, osteoporosis.

Preparation and dosage:

Tincture: 1/2 to 1 tsp. 3 to 5 times daily (see note below.)

Decoction (root): Simmer 15 to 30 min. Take 4 oz. Frequently

Infusion (leaf): Steep 20 to 30 min. 4 to 6 oz. 3 times daily

Oxymel 1 tsp; up to 6 times daily

Powder: 5 to 10 #0 capsules; 3 times daily.

Notes:

Comfrey is a good choice for a first aid kit or homestead apothecary.

Comfrey tincture is best prepared using low alcohol (20%) or glycerin based medium, which releases the active saccharides while minimizing the extraction of the suspect alkaloids. Dried leaf and roots can also be made into very effective infusion and decoction on an as needed basis. The dried product no longer contains the suspect alkaloids.

The wound healing reputation of comfrey is due to the presence of allantoin. Used externally comfrey leaf speeds wound healing and encourages proper scar formation. Care must be taken to avoid the use of comfrey with deep wounds, where the external application of comfrey can speed tissue formation over the wound before the it is healed deeper down, which can lead to abscesses.

Internal use of comfrey is done with caution. Some of the alkaloids in comfrey have been found in laboratory experiments to cause liver toxicity in rats and may be a potential carcinogen. These alkaloids are present in the fresh leaf but absent from the dried leaf. Potentially, using the dried leaf in the manufacture of tinctures and tisanes may avoid the suspect alkaloids. For this reason many professional herbalists have stopped recommending comfrey to their patients, while continuing to use comfrey for their own health. (Rosemary Gladstar)

Comfrey is banned in marketed natural health products in Canada, and restricted in Australia, New Zealand, and UK. Those who wish to use comfrey in Canada must grow their own.

Ironically, comfrey has a reputed anti-cancer action in European folk medicine.

In the treatment of wounds, external ulcers, and broken bones, comfrey may be applied as a compress or poultice.

Comfrey's astringency makes it valuable in the treatment of bleeding.

Resources:

Philip Fritchey. *Practical Herbalism, ordinary plants with Extraordinary Powers.* (Warsaw, IN:Whitman Pub.) 2004.

Rosemary Gladstar. *Herbal Recipes for Vibrant Health*. (North Adams, MA: Storey Pub., 2008).

David Hoffman. *Medical Herbalism, The Science and Practice of Herbal Medicine*.(Rochester, Vt: Healing Arts Press) 2003.