

Potato

The potato crop belongs to a number of american crops like maize and bean and is a member of the so called “deadly” Nightshade family along with the well known poisonous herbs Mandrake and Belladonna. They are not the only non-toxic member however, with Tomato, Eggplant, Capsicum & Tobacco also being in the same club. Most of these plants have been introduced to Eurpoe only in the last five centuries and were initially considered poisonous or evil due to their similarities to the more dangerous members of the nightshade family. The first edible potatoes are considered to have been cultivated 4000 years ago in Peru after considerable effort to breed out the dangerous alkaloids that had previously made them inedible.

It is interesting to note that after their introduction to Europe, the potato crops were initially used as a medicinal plant and grown by pharmacists in Spain. By the time of the Alaskan gold rush however, (1897-1898) potatoes were well known & highly prized. In fact they were so valued for their vitamin C content that miners even traded gold for potatoes to stave off disease.

In their homeland of Peru, they were also utilized as a medicine, and amongst other things raw slices of potato were placed on broken bones to promote healing. They were also carried against the body to prevent rheumatism & eaten with other foods to prevent indigestion.

European topical folk uses included: the treatment of facial blemishes by washing the face daily with cool potato juice or frostbite and sunburn by applying raw grated potato or potato juice to the affected area. Potatoes were also said to ease aches and pains by rubbing the affected area with the water that they have been boiled in.

In addition to this potato and milk poultices are still used for cuts, wounds, skin infections and swellings. Internally raw potato juice is used for gastritis and stomach swellings and it is believed that its alkaline properties make it good for combating uric acid retention, rheumatism and arthritis. A potato poultice is also a traditional home remedy for inflammation. Applied to the skin, it is used to heal skin conditions such as eczema and over the joints it is used to relieve arthritis. The Chinese classify it as a cooling herb and state that it: relieves ulcer pain, strengthens spleen, harmonizes the stomach, tonifies the chi, lubricates the intestines and promotes diuresis.

A traditional Australian use is the ingestion of a small spring potato grated and eaten raw every day to clean the lymphatic system and reduce parasites. Drovers have combined this with pumpkin seeds for a total parasitic cleanse when far away from medical services.

As with all fruits and vegetables however, the only way to ensure medicinal properties is to buy quality ORGANIC produce.

- The Barefoot Doctor