

# St. John's Wort

by Karen Unruh

I want to tell you about St. John's Wort in June as this is the month you will find St. John's Wort blooming. *Hypericum perforatum*, the Latin name for the medicinal St. John's Wort, is a 2-3-foot-tall perennial, a beautiful plant with small yellow flowers, only 1/2 inch across, and 1/4-inch leaves. Other hypericums are used as accents or ground cover in gardens with much larger leaves and 2-inch flowers – they are NOT used medicinally. *Hypericum perforatum*, the medicinal St. John's Wort, grows wild in dry fields or often along the roadsides.

You can identify this St. John's Wort by looking at the underside of the small leaves and see many tiny holes – thus the name 'perforatum.' And where did the plant get the St. John's part of it's name? The yellow buds and flowers appear about June 24<sup>th</sup>, and these flower parts have a red oil pigment – a pigment named in memory of the day in June when St. John was beheaded. And the term 'wort' was used to indicate a medicinal plant. St. John's Wort has many uses – lifting depression, healing nerve endings, healing burns and skin wounds are the uses I will share with you.

You may have heard that St. John's Wort is an antidepressant. It is, and I will share with you how it can be used to help lift your spirits and cure the winter blues. But for severe depression, it is not usually advised to mix St. John's Wort herbals with antidepressant medication.

First we must pick the flowers to make either an oil or a concentrated tea, our healing ingredient to use in a jelly. So, in June, watch for the flowers in a grassy meadow or by the unattended side of the road, and pick 'today's flowers' -- the ones opening today. In June I watch for the plants growing at the front right open side of the large patch of yellow gorse that is just before Resort Way on the drive into Parksville. Please do not cut down the St. John's Wort that is there, thinking that you can pick the flower petals off when you get home.

First we will make an oil. As you pick the flowers each day for a two week period or so, put the flowers in a glass jar and cover them with organic extra virgin olive oil. Add more flowers each day and add more oil to keep the flowers covered with the oil. When you have enough yellow petals for your jar and they are all covered in oil, put a chopstick in the jar and cover the jar with a cloth draped over the chop stick. Stir the petals and oil once a day and let it sit for 6 weeks. You can place it on a window sill. I was taught to keep the jar open when making an oil from fresh ingredients so that moisture can evaporate and mold will not form. The oil turns a lovely red colour from the pigment in the petals. My mother and I have made this oil together – she to use to rub on her feet to help ease neuralgia in the nerve endings in the feet, and I to use as a skin oil when many years ago I prevented a skin burn from radiation treatment. I use it now as an oil to prevent sunburn. I have learned that some people become

sun sensitive when they use St. John's Wort oil as a sunscreen but I have not known anyone to have that sensitivity.

St. John's Wort has a wonderful calming quality. To assess that quality I made St. John's Wort Jelly, to have a spoonful a day, especially on dreary winter mornings. I dried the flower petals by laying them out in a shallow pan in the sun (gives any little creepers a chance to escape), bringing them inside for the nights. Then I made a strong tea with the dried petals, and turned that tea into a jelly using a product called Pomona's Universal Pectin--a product sold at Naked Naturals that is used to jell juice based on the calcium content. Hence a little honey is all that is needed for sweetener. The jelly is a lovely rose colour – just the colour alone can banish the winter blues. And of course you can enjoy it in summer as well, just to raise your spirits.

There is another story I want to share with you regarding St. John's Wort. As we become more closely connected to our plant friends, it is important to take notice when we see them – especially when we see them in abundance. I was driving Highway I-5 to Portland in June and I noticed the roadsides covered in St. John's Wort blooms. When I saw this, I said to myself “Pay attention – this plant has a message for me” and perhaps the message for me and for the population in that area was “take care of yourself, keep your spirits up, observe your moods and if you need help, seek it out – perhaps with a herbalist”.



*Hypericum perforatum*



Dried flower petals



St. John's Wort oil

## St. John's Wort Jelly

Make 4 cups of tea using 1/2 cup of dried St. John's Wort petals, or 1 cup fresh petals and 4 cups of boiling water. Let the tea steep several hours. Strain and use as juice in the jelly recipe that follows.

Use the Pomona's Universal Pectin. Make the calcium water as per the instructions included in the package, using the calcium powder which is in the package.

Prepare small jars as for making jelly and plan on using a boiling water bath with a rack for the jars to seal the lids.

Put 4 cups of St. John's Wort tea into a saucepan. Add 1/4 cup lemon juice and 4 teaspoons of calcium water and stir well.

Measure 3/4 cup honey into a bowl. Thoroughly mix in 4 teaspoons pectin powder, provided in the Pomona package.

Bring the tea mixture to a boil, add the pectin-honey mixture, and stir vigorously for 1 to 2 minutes while cooking to dissolve the pectin. Return to a boil and remove from heat.

Fill jars to 1/4 inch of top. Wipe rims clean. Screw on 2-piece lids.

Put filled jars in boiling water to cover. Boil 5 minutes. Remove from water. Let jars cool. Check seals – lids should be sucked down.

Because of low sugar content, the jelly must be kept in the refrigerator after opening and should be used in about 3 weeks.



St. John's Wort Jelly