

Natural Healing Express Weekly

Column 377 My Friend Jane and Comfrey

This week, I am choosing to feature my friend Jane Hawley Stevens of Four Elements. Jane is a world class herbalist and is the owner of Four Elements (one of our very best suppliers and featured in our Natural Medicine Kits)

Everyone, please give a warm welcome to Jane! Here are her thoughts on Comfrey.

“This past week I had a call from a customer who was concerned about the use of comfrey in our Rose Comfrey cream. Comfrey, *Symphytum officinale*, has been used safely and beneficially for centuries to assist in maintaining healthy skin tissue and regeneration. In recent years, comfrey has been scrutinized because of a constituent called pyrrolizidine alkaloids (P.As.). Let me explain the difference between finding this constituent in a scientific study and what happens when a whole plant is used for a condition.

When a plant goes through an assay the constituents are separated and identified. Concluding that a plant is toxic based on its isolated constituents is like saying cocoa leaves can kill you when actually it is the isolated cocaine extracted from the whole plant that causes harm. Similarly, I wonder how many people would have diabetes if we made tea from the whole sugar cane to make things sweet as opposed to the extracted crystals? Using the whole plant part keeps plant medicine safer, buffered by the hundreds of other constituents within the plant.

Isolated P.As. will not act the same as the whole plant. In one study on P.As., rats were administered the equivalent dose/body weight of over 5,000 comfrey leaves if given to a human. This does not happen in Nature.

So how toxic is comfrey? Mark Blumenthal, American Botanical Council Director states, "The comfrey incident (reported overdose) might have looked different if it had been put into context of a toxicity scale. One such scale is the Human Exposure/Rodent Potency (HERP) index, which classifies the cancer-causing potentials of various substances." Extrapolating from the HERP index, James Duke, Ph.D., former U.S. Department of Agriculture Botanist calculates that less than .2 oz. of brown mustard is twice as cancer-causing as comfrey tea, which has roughly the same cancer-causing potential as a peanut butter sandwich. As another example, Duke states that wine is 144 times more cancer-causing than an equal amount of comfrey tea.

I call comfrey "The aloe of the north" because when you open the root, it has the same soft, demulcent quality found inside the aloe leaf. Aloe is probably the most common topical herb used in America, and comfrey can be used similarly. I recommend planting it between a rock and a hard place so it won't take up your entire area. The more you harvest the roots, the more the plant spreads!

It seems to shout, "I want to help humans, so I will be plentiful and prolific!" I have learned to even recycle the water used for washing the roots back into my comfrey patch because any remaining rootlets will re-root.

Herbs have been used for centuries and have thousands of years of imperial evidence. Think of it as "synergy," meaning that the interaction of two or more constituents produces a combined effect that is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

According to esteemed and beloved herbalist, Rosemary Gladstar, "If our pharmaceutical industry were subject to such standards, we would have no drugs on the market at all and very few herbs."

Meanwhile, the Austrian company that conducted the original tests verified that the tests were inconclusive. In Japan, where the alkaloids were first discovered, doctors still continue to recommend comfrey. Paracelsus, renowned Renaissance physician and herbalist, said, "All things are poison and nothing is without poison. It is the dosage that makes a thing poisonous or not."

Comfrey Hepatotoxicity, Henriette's Herbal Homepage

Is Comfrey Getting a Bad Rap? Kerry Luskey Smith

The Comfrey Controversy, Rosemary Gladstar"

Great job Jane! Hope everyone has a wonderful week! Susan

Dr. Susan is available on Wednesdays and Saturdays and by appointment!

Enjoy! Hope to see you soon and as always, please contact us via one of the following methods. Natural

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