

Icelandic flora

Angelica archangelica - *Achillea millefolium* - *Rhodiola rosea*



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The variety of plants in the world is extraordinary. Almost everywhere on our planet we can find plants. In a dry deserts and a rainy jungle. In calm lakes and lively rivers. On deep seafloors an high mountain tops.

Plants have medicinal, culinary or fragrance features. In Iceland we can find many plants with healing properties. Some of them are very well known like Icelandic Moss, used to produce pills for sore throat, some of them are less recognised like for exame Devil's Bit Scabious, infusion from the roots of this one is good to cure coughing. Thanks to unspoiled environment, pure water, soil and air Iceland is a paradise to harvest herbs and other healing plants. Hikes and other outdoor activities are perfect to learn more about nature and how rich it is. We can use it to support treatments or simply in our kitchens.

Yarrow

One of these plants is yarrow or *Achillea millefolium* in latin. It's common around human habitat in Iceland. Up in Northen-Iceland it's also common in the wild. There it can be found in up to 700m above sealevel. Yarrow is a perennial plant. It has a strong scent and is 15 - 40 cm high. It is known for its many small flowers. Its name in Latin, millefolium, means thousand leaves. These flowers are usually white, but sometimes they can be pink.

Yarrow has been used for medical purposes for centuries. As a treatment for unregular and painfull periods. It lowers blood pressure and helps with irritation due to meunapose. Sometimes it was even used to fill up holes in damaged teeth. It is mentioned in the tale about Achilles. He is said to have used yarrow to stop bleeding among his soldiers. In Icelandic yarrow has names that indicate its use. These names are hermannajurt (soldiers plant), blóðjurt hermanna (blood plant of soldiers), blóðnasir (bloody nose) and more. Yarrow is still used for internal and external medicine. It is nice to be able to walk right up to this scentfull, useful and pretty flower in your nearest environment.

Rhodiola Rosea

What? Where?

Rhodiola rosea is a medium size succulent plant in the family of the Stonecrop (crassulaceae). The plant itself is usually from 10 to 30 cm tall. The leaves are thick and pointy. They are 2 to 6 cm long and 1 to 1.5cm large. They are gathered around the stem all the way up to the blom. The stem is 2 to 6mm thick. They produce beautiful yellow flowers. You can also find them in grades of pink and red. The blooming season is at the beginning of the summer in June.

This plant is found almost everywhere in Iceland except in some desert in the North of Vatnajökull. It is often found on cliffs or in remote areas like Hornstrandir. Where it is out of reach from the sheep. It usually doesn't survive sheep grazing. It is a plant that, like the cold climate, can find it in other parts of the world. For example, in the European mountains, alps, rocky mountains of Asia, you will find it up to 3000m!

History

The first time we saw the word *búrnirót* written in an Icelandic book was in the travel book of Svein Pálssonar in 1791. *Rhodiola* traveled through the years under different names here in Iceland. It has been called *Greiðurót* (comb root) or *höfðurót* (head root). "*Svæfla*" coming from old Icelandic has once been used for it, pointing out its properties against insomnia. *Munnsviðarót* (mouth ulcer root) also has been heard and seen to describe this plant. *Sedum rosea* in old English, referred to the fragrance coming from the freshly cut rhizomes and roots.

In the old days, they believed that *Rhodiola* had protective power. They said it was good to have it near or lay it by the bed to chase the evils away. If a woman had difficulties giving birth, it was advised to put *Rhodiola* in her bed so it touches her.

Sagas say that even the vikings have been using it for its magic properties to improve their endurance in the cold Icelandic climate.

Medicine

Rhodiola is known for its outstanding health properties. It has been used as an alternative medicine for ages. The part of the plant used for medicinal purposes are the roots. Nowadays, many studies have been held proving its efficacy.

- It is regarded as a potent anti-aging medicine.
- A powerful adaptogen that improves the body's response to stress.
- It increases stamina.
- It decreases fatigue.
- It has also been proven to treat anxiety.
- It is good against mild depression.
- It reduces mental confusion.
- They also call it natural viagra of the north as it has been known to boost the libido.

- It enhances alertness, concentration and memory.

In the old days they used it for even more. Some icelandic text book from 1830 indicate:

- It heals sore mouths
- Cleans kidneys of sand which would become gravel
- Stop diarrhea
- Heals headache
- Strengthens the head
- Grow hair
- Reduces swelling
- Eases back and joint ache
- Is healthy for leprosy people

Culinary

Counter to what most people might think, *rhodiola rosea* is edible. In Alaska and northern Canada Inuit have been eating it for generations. Here, the parts used for cooking are the stems and leaves. They use them as a wild green vegetable. They are usually picked at the beginning of the summer when they are young and fresh. To preserve them for a long period of time, they are fermented in water. They are then consumed with the fermentation water.

It is also possible to use them raw and fresh like they do in Northern Scandinavia. Lapon people use the leaves to make fresh salads. In Russia it has been used to flavor vodka.

Ætihvönn (*Angelica archangelica*) "The root of the holy spirit"

Angelica archangelica is probably the most extraordinary herb found in Iceland and according to old manuscripts it has been used for medicine and for culinary purposes from the beginning of settlement in Iceland. Ætihvönn or Hvönn grows all around Iceland, is common around streams and riverbanks. All parts of the herb can be used: stalks, roots, leaves and seeds, all can be used fresh, cooked or dried.

Hvönn is so common in Iceland that many well-known places have a name after it, like Hvannalindir or Hvannadalshnúkur, to name just these two.

When to collect:

leaves: early summer

roots: digg up either in the spring or in the winter

HISTORY:

- in the old time vikings used Angelica roots as a currency when they did trade in other countries
- according to Grágás, an old Icelandic lawbook, anyone who enters another man's garden and is caught stealing Angelica archangelica should be sanctioned
- the origin of the latin name of this herb comes from an old tale which tells that the herb appeared in an angel's dream as a cure against black death
- Angelica archangelica was considered to give protection against evil spirits and any kind of black magic

MEDICINE

- The herb has a very stimulating effect on the immune system and is effective in fighting all kinds of viruses.
- boost for immune system
- it is used to cure digestive and as well as bronchial problems and sore throat
- good for skin problems like for example psoriasis and acne
- relieve insomnia, nervous headaches, fevers
- helps in wound healing

CULINARY

- roots can be used in soups, bread, tea and as a condiment in alcohol and beer
- roots were in the old days widely consumed. They were stored in the earth during the wintertime but when eaten with dried fish and butter.
- jam from angelica leaves is very popular you can do it yourself or buy in some shops
- seeds are used as spice or for tea
- seeds are recommended as a spice for Icelandic lamb meat. Some sheep farmers from West Iceland grazing their lambs in fields of Angelica, resulting in a unique taste of the lamb meat.
- stalks of the herb can be peeled and eaten both raw and cooked.
- flowers can be also use as a decoration for cakes

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