



## Red Clover

*Trifolium pratense*

Red Clover belongs to the Fabaceae family (formerly known as Leguminaceae) and originates from Europe and Asia, though it has spread to most places in the world.

*"To make a prairie it takes a clover & one bee."*

- Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), U.S. Poet

**Identification:** A perennial herb with trifoliate leaves; each leaf divided into three and it grows in clumps, unlike white clover which can run for miles. The flowers are globe-like, can vary in colour from a very soft pink to dark purplish pink and are the medicinal part of the plant. They are 10–16 mm long and are sweetly scented, blooming from October–March. The foliage is also very nourishing for stock.



(Image from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trifolium\\_pratense\\_-\\_Keila2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trifolium_pratense_-_Keila2.jpg))

**Cultivation:** The main flowering time is from late spring to late summer. It prefers to grow in full sun with good rich fertile soil. Its roots act as a nitrogen fixer in the soil (a feature of the Fabaceae family). The foliage is a wonderful stock food, being rich in proteins, minerals and vitamins, and can be cut up to three times a year and still thrive. It not only feeds stock and provides us with medicine but also deposits nutrients back in the soil. It grows from seeds, tolerates most soils in an open sunny situation.

**Parts used:** Flowers; take great care when harvesting not to bruise the flowers. This can reduce the benefits of the active chemical constituents. Take a basket or bucket out with you and pluck gently, don't squeeze. To dry the flowers, spread gently on a tray and put in a warm airy place, not in direct sunlight. When completely dry store in either a glass jar or a clean paper bag and label with the date.

**Character:** Cool and slightly sweet

**Constituents:** Including vitamins A, B complex, and P (when fresh), high in minerals, magnesium, calcium, copper, with some selenium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, sodium, tin, and iron. Flavonoids which act as antioxidants, isoflavones (including genestein, biochanin A, diadzen, isotrifolin, isorhamnetin, pratol, pratensol, trifolin and trifolirhizin), trifoliin, glycitein, calycosin, trifoside, pratensein, prunetin, pseudobaptigenin, phenolic glycosides, coumarins (including coumarin, coumestrol and medicagol), hentriacontane, heptacosane, myricyl alcohol, and b-sitosterol, isorhamnetin glucosides, cyanogenic glycosides, procyanidin polymers, cis-clovamide, trans-caffeic and cis-caffeic acids, phaseic acid, fats, galactoglucomannan, furfural, resins and mineral salts.

**Therapeutic actions:** Skin healing agent, expectorant, mild anti-spasmodic, mild anti-inflammatory, anti-neoplastic (anti cancer), diuretic, mild sedative, alterative (balances metabolism, blood cleanser) its oestrogenic activity may help women with hormonal imbalances.

**Medicinal uses:** Respiratory system, coughs (inc. whooping cough, bronchitis). Red clover assists with treating skin conditions such as eczema, psoriasis and other chronic problems. It is considered a blood tonic, cleansing the body when taken internally. Your skin is the largest organ of elimination in your body and if you are not processing wastes well via the digestive system and liver your skin may develop rashes, itching and scaly patches. Red Clover assists with improving metabolic functions. Topically the freshly crushed flowers can be used on stings and insect bites. Assists soothing coughs, bronchitis and whooping cough. For this the flowers are made into a syrup.

They can be used topically for relief, as a wash, compress or a cream. Use a compress for arthritic pains, gout and athlete's foot.

Taken internally it soothes the nerves and promotes calm sleep. It is considered to assist with the treatment for infertility. Traditionally, Red Clover has been used as a treatment for cancer, especially breast, ovarian and lymphatic. Recent research is supporting the traditional uses for cancer, ah; science is validating 'old wives'! (\*See Caution)

Take as a tincture, infusion or syrup (esp. for colds). Infusion as an eye bath for conjunctivitis.

**Dosage:** Infusion; Pour boiling water over fresh or dried flowers and cover. Leave standing until it reaches drinking temperature. Take care to strain liquid well first. Sweeten with a little honey if desired.

1-2 cups daily for 1-2 weeks in spring and autumn. It is not advisable to take continuously. Tincture; take 10–20 mls per week. A small dose when compared to many other herbs.

Externally: A strong decoction can be used as an eye wash for conjunctivitis and to remove dust or grit from the eye.

Compress: Place either fresh or dried flowers (see following) in a small bowl, pour boiling water over to just cover.

Cover with a lid and leave to infuse until cool enough to put on the skin. Hot compress for arthritis, room temperature for eczema or psoriasis. You can also place the flowers in a flannel or small towel, wet with the infused water and place on the affected area.

**Red clover Cough Syrup:** Use 100 ml of infusion/decoction to a 100g sugar (use white sugar, as it is less likely to ferment). Warm infusion/decoction, stir in sugar until completely dissolved cool and pour into sterilized bottle(s) and stop with a cork. Refrigerate to lessen chance of fermentation. Honey or raw sugar can be used, but will ferment more rapidly – ok if being used quickly. Dose 5-10 ml 3x daily.

**Contraindications and cautions:** This is considered a “safe herb”, \* though it is advised, because of its oestrogenic activity, to be avoided by women with oestrogen dominant cancers, though it is considered to be anti-cancer and early research has indicated it may be a useful treatment for prostate cancer.

**Other Uses:** A yellow dye is obtained from the flowers.

**Culinary:** The seeds can be sprouted and served as a salad vegetable. Make sure they are not chemically treated though.

**Folklore and Mysticism:** Red Clover has much interesting history & folklore. Some of its folk names include; honey, honey stalks, trefoil, trifoil, heart trefoil, red shamrock, cowgrass, pea vine clover. Other attributes to Red Clover are: Gender; masculine, Planet; Mercury, Element; Air, Deity; Rowan. Powers; protection, money, love, fidelity, exorcism and added to bath water is said to aid you in dealing with financial arrangements. Known to be used in ‘*lust potions*’ and is sprinkled to remove negative spirits!

The Romans used this herb widely and Pliny, born AD23 recommended it to be used to treat urinary stones and dropsy. It has a tradition of use for treating skin conditions, including ulcerations, sores and skin cancers, also asthma and bronchitis. As a ‘blood purifier’ and tonic in general. Back to Eden, written by Jethro Kloss (1863-1946) records uses of Red Clover in ‘early colonial America,’ Kloss was a pioneer of promoting whole foods and vegetarianism.

Red Clover is one of the ingredients s of the ‘controversial Hoxsey cancer treatment,’ developed by Harry Hoxsey in the 1920’s. The formula was developed after his grandfather observed what sick horses grazed on to restore their health. The Early Christians looked at the symbolism of plants and associated the three lobed leaves with the Trinity. Such an interesting herb, so well worth growing!

(Image from

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trifolium\\_pratense\\_04.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trifolium_pratense_04.JPG))

*"It is under the dominion of the Sun; and if it were used, it would be found as great a strengthener of the heart, and cherisher of the vital spirits as grows, relieving the body against fainting and swoonings, fortifying it against poison and pestilence, defending the heart against the noisome vapours of the spleen."* - Nicholas Culpeper (1616-1654), English Herbalist.



**\*Advisory Note:** This text is given a general guidance. If any adverse reactions occur or symptoms persist, please contact a qualified Medical Herbalist or Doctor immediately