

Common comfrey

Symphytum officinale

Description

Introduced to North America in the 1600s for its medicinal properties. Now, products containing comfrey are illegal in the United States due to the alkaloids it contains. It is capable of causing fatal liver toxicity and plays a role as a cancer causing agent.

Habit

Large, coarse, tuberous, clumping perennial capable of growing up to 3 feet tall.

Leaves

Basal leaves are large, pointed, hairy, ovate-lanceolate, dark green in color and grow to about 8 inches long. Upper leaves are decurrent, smaller. Mature leaves are winged.

Stems

Green in color, hairy, erect to ascending, clump forming, branched.

Flowers



Tubular, 1/2 long, bell-shaped; white, pink or purple in color, 5 shallow lobes, borne in drooping clusters. Calyx and stalks are covered in bristly hairs.

Fruits and Seeds

Cluster of 4 nutlets maturing to shiny brownish-black in color.

Habitat

Native to Europe and Asia. Can be found in roadsides, ditches, fields, yards and disturbed sites.

Reproduction

By seed and vegetatively by root fragments or division.

Similar

Tall bluebells (*Mertensia paniculata*)

Monitoring and Rapid Response

Very difficult to remove by hand as any root fragment left behind can easily resprout.

Credits

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