Tussilago farfara

**DESCRIPTION** Coltsfoot is a small perennial herb with distinctive heart-shaped leaves that are bright green above and silvery below due to a felt-like layer of white hairs. Bright yellow flower heads are produced on scaly stalks in early spring, before the leaves emerge.

**ORIGIN** Asia, Europe, and North Africa. The raw material is wild-harvested in eastern and southeastern Europe.

**PARTS USED** Mainly the dried leaves (*Farfarae folium*; syn. *Tussilaginis folium*). In former times the dried flower heads, whole herb or roots were also used.

**THERAPEUTIC CATEGORY** Expectorant, antitussive.

**USES AND PROPERTIES** The herb has a long history of use as an effective cough medicine and it is still used to treat cough and throat inflammation, asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory ailments. Coltsfoot is no longer very popular because it contains pyrrolizidine alkaloids (see below). Flower heads and roots are no longer used.

**PREPARATION AND DOSAGE** A tea may be prepared from 0.6-2.5 g of dried leaves, taken three times per day. Liquid extracts, tinctures and syrups are also used. Leaves and leaf extracts are included in cough teas and commercial cough preparations. Some experts argue that pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs) should be completely avoided, while others consider the very low levels not to be harmful, provided the daily intake does not exceed 1 µg alkaloid and that the period of use not exceeds six weeks per year (see *Senecio ovatus*).

**ACTIVE INGREDIENTS** The cough-relieving effects are usually ascribed to mucilage, that occurs in levels of up to 10% of the dry herb. Also of interest is the presence of a sesquiterpene ester, known as tussilagone. The flower heads and leaves contain 100 µg per g (0.01% dry weight) of pyrrolizidine alkaloids and their N-oxides – mainly senkirkine and tussilagine but also seneconine in some sources of raw material.

**PHARMACOLOGICAL EFFECTS** Mucilage forms a protective layer over the inflamed mucous membranes of the throat and mouth and thereby counteracts the urge to cough. Animal studies have shown that tussilagone is a respiratory stimulant.

**WARNING** PAs can be carcinogenic; do not use PA-rich coltsfoot (especially during pregnancy).

**STATUS** Traditional medicine; Pharm.; Comm.E+ (leaf only).

*Tussilago farfara* L.

Глава text (French); Husflacht (German); farfaro (Italian); farfara (Spanish)

**family** Asteraceae

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