

185. *IRIS VERSICOLOR* L. (IRIDACEAE) — Blue Flag

Ornamental. The blue flowers yield a blue infusion which can substitute for litmus paper. Source of iridin or irisin of commerce, a bitter aperient, diuretic. Iridin acts on the liver and is milder on the bowel than podophyllum.<sup>2</sup>

Roots have been used in teas (dangerous), poultices, and ointments for cancer, felons, and tumors, especially of the breast and kidney.<sup>4</sup> Root alterative, cathartic, depurative, diuretic, emetic, laxative, purgative, resolvent, sialogogue, and stimulant. Has been recommended for blood impurities, cancer, constipation, dropsy, gastritis, liver ailments, rheumatism, scrofula, skin diseases, and syphilis.<sup>32</sup> Poulticed onto felons to relieve the pain, even when suppuration is far advanced. This herb, which is said to increase the rate of fat catabolism, was used for obesity by Indias Caraka Samhita as early as 3000 B.C.<sup>11</sup> Homeopaths prescribe the root tincture for anal fissures, bilious attack, constipation, crusta lactea, diabetes, diarrhea, dysentery, dysmenorrhea, dyspepsia, eczema, fistula, gastrodynia, headache, hemicrania, hepatitis, impetigo, liver, migraine, morning sickness, nausea, neuralgia, nocturnal emission, pancreas, parotitis, pregnancy, psoriasis, rectal burning, rheumatism, salivation, sciatica, whitlow, and zoster.<sup>30 33</sup>

Rhizome contains essential oil (with furfural), gum, resin, starch, tannin, alpha-phytosterol, myricylalcohol, heptacosan, ipuranol, isophthalic acid, salicylic acid, lauric, palmitic, and stearic acids.<sup>33</sup>

**Toxicity** — Root contains the poisonous iridin. The glycoside can be poisonous to livestock which ingest it. Sometimes confused with sweet flag, with disastrous results. Full doses of iridin may cause nausea and severe prostration.