

177 *HYOSCYAMUS NIGER* L. (SOLANACEAE) — Henbane, Henblain, Jusquaimé

Dried leaves of henbane contain the alkaloid hyoscyamine, used in the treatment of alcohol and morphine habits, as a mydriatic, sedative, pain killer, and in motion sickness. In Europe, henbane is administered for earache and rheumatism. Leaves are said to repel mice. Pliny hinted at henbanes use as an intoxicant, more than four leaves in a drink putting the drinker beside himself. According to Hocking, henbane was used as an anesthetic in the Middle Ages (with aconite, datura, hemlock, mandrake, opium, etc.), either as a "soporific sponge" or "sleeping apple" pomander, acting through inhalation. It was also employed illegally as a sleeping potion or "Mickey Finn". Arabian familiarity with the herb was indicated in "The Thousand and One Nights" where guards were drugged by one who cast henbane leaves onto the fire. A nearly inconceivable contraceptive was formed by mashing the seed into paste with mare's milk and tying the paste in a piece of wild bull's skin.¹⁷⁹

The juice, prepared in various manners, is used for indurations of the mammary glands, carcinomata, parotid tumors, condylomata, and cancerous wounds. A cataplasm of the leaf is used for tumors of the scrotum, cancerous ulcers, painful swellings, glandular tumors, and cancer. The tea made from the plant is said to remedy tumors.⁴ Leaves are considered anodyne, antidiabetic, antispasmodic, carminative, hypnotic, mildly laxative, mydriatic, narcotic, and sedative. The herb is used for asthma, bronchitis, cough, hydrophobia, neuralgia, and rheumatism.³⁰ In India, leaves are sometimes smoked with ganja; powdered seeds and smoke from burning seeds are applied for toothache, and seeds mixed in wine are applied to gout swellings.¹ Russians smoke a mixture of henbane, sage, and jimsonweed for asthma.