

147. *GALIUM ODORATUM* (L.) Scop. (RUBIACEAE) — Woodruff, Sweet Woodruff, Waldmeister

Dried leaves and flowers are used in candies, sachets, snuffs, wines and liqueurs, herb "teas", and fruit beverages. Used as fragrance component in European perfumes. Fresh sprigs are also used as garnish in certain summer beverages and wines. Woodruff is a component of bitters, maywines, and vermouth.²⁹ Powdered leaves are put in potpourri. Dried herb is also placed among linens to protect against insects. The plant contains coumarin, which has the fragrance of new mown hay, and is used as a fixative for other odors. The herb has proven bactericidal activity.³³ Asperuloside has antiphlogistic activity.

Plant used for inflammatory tumors.⁴ Entire plant used as a sedative for old and young alike.⁸ Medicinally, bruised leaves are applied to cuts and wounds.⁴⁷ A strong decoction is said to be used as a stomachic and to remove biliary obstructions of the liver. The tea is used for bladderstones, hepatitis, insomnia, migraine, neuralgia, restlessness, and stomachache.²⁹ If enough drunk, it is said to incite venery.⁴⁷ Employed homeopathically for colpitis and metritis, woodruff is said to be antiphlogistic, antispasmodic, aperitif, aromatic, cordial, depurative, diaphoretic, diuretic, hypnotic, sedative, and stomachic.^{27 29 32}

In addition to the toxic coumarin, woodruff contains citric-, malic-, rubichloric-, and tannic-acid; asperulisin, tannin, asperuloside (0.05%); monotropein, anthracene and naphthalene derivatives, emulsion, and traces of nicotinic acid.³³ The root contains a red dyestuff of the alizarine type.

Toxicity — Dietary feeding of coumarin to experimental animals causes extensive liver damage, growth retardation, and testicular atrophy. FDA approved for use in alcoholic beverages only (§ 172.510).²⁹