



## SOUTHERNWOOD

Southernwood is native to Spain and Italy. The herb was naturalized in the eastern part of the United States, where it today primarily grows wild. There are over 200 species in the *Artemisia* genus. Southernwood is closely related to European wormwood (absinthe.)

### Botanical Description:

*Artemisia* can be differentiated from other closely related plants with gray-green leaves due to the distinct lemon smell emitted by their leaves when crushed. For the majority, the plants in the genus have small, alternate leaves, with dioecious flowers. With age, these plants become progressively woodier.<sup>1</sup>

Southernwood is a small shrub that can reach five feet high on average, with a spread of 2 feet. Southernwood has small, yellow-white flowers which bloom in late summer; though, the southernwood located in northerner regions of the world rarely flower. The herb has a lemony/camphor like fragrance which turns distinctly lemony when cut. Its gray-green leaves are slightly hairy, though become less so as the season progresses.<sup>2</sup>

### Etymology:

“Southernwood” is the Old English name for “woody plant that comes from the south.” Its genus derives from Artemis, the Goddess of chastity. “*Abortanum*” comes from the Greek word “abros” meaning “delicate.”<sup>3</sup> Artemis is also known as Diana, the Mother of all Creatures and Goddess of the Herbalist, the Hunt and Wild things.<sup>4</sup>

Southernwood has many other names including: Appleringie, Boy’s Love, European Sage, Garden Sagebrush, Lad’s Love (because of its ancient reputation as an aphrodisiac),<sup>5</sup> Lemon Plant, Lover’s Plant, Maid’s Ruin, Old Man or Old Man Wormwood (the herb’s extra winter foliage makes the herb appear tattered, but protects the plant from harsh winds),<sup>6</sup> Our Lord’s Wood and Southern Wormwood.

### Cultural Significance:

There are many cultural myths surrounding this herb. For instance, an individual will “see the beloved” if the herb is used as a dream pillow, sachet or charm<sup>7</sup>. Also, in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century,

Kingdom	Plantae
<b>Division</b>	Magnoliophyta
<b>Class</b>	Magnoliopsida
<b>Order</b>	Asterales
<b>Family</b>	Asteracea (Daisy)
<b>Genus</b>	<i>Artemisia</i>
<b>Species</b>	<i>A. abortanum</i>
<b>Varietal</b>	<i>A. abortanum</i> <i>composita</i>

<sup>1</sup> Armitage, A. M., Herbaceous Perennial Plants : A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes (Athens: Varsity Press, 1989) 64.

<sup>2</sup> Armitage 64.

<sup>3</sup> O'Connor, A., Hirshfeld, M. & Cornell Plantations, An Herb Garden Companion and Guide to the Robison York State Herb Garden (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1984) 15.

<sup>4</sup> Grieve, M. & Leyel, C.F., A Modern Herbal : The Medicinal, Culinary, Cosmetic, and Economic Properties, Cultivation, and Folklore of Herbs, Grasses, Fungi, Shrubs, and Trees with all their Modern Scientific Uses (New York: Dorset Press, 1992,1971) 755.

<sup>5</sup> O'Connor 15.

<sup>6</sup> Callery, Emma, The Complete Book of Herbs : A Practical Guide to Cultivating, Drying, and Cooking with More than 50 Herbs (Philadelphia: Courage Books, 1994) 69.

<sup>7</sup> Grieve 755.

Image: “Artemesia- Southernwood:” <http://www.flickr.com/photos/buttersweet/47285806/>

southernwood was believed to protect an individual from witchcraft and the evil eye; contrastingly, the herb was used at the same time to make love potions and charms, which at the time were associated with witchcraft. Southernwood was also believed to stimulate a young man's passion. This belief is apparent in the English Herbalist Henry Lyte's 1578 recommendation that

“it be layde under the bedde, pillow or bolster, it provoketh the carnall copulation and resisteth all enchantments, which may let or hinder such business and the inticements to the same.”<sup>8</sup>

People also believed the herb to stimulate the growth of men's beards; thus, men would rub an ointment made from the herb's ashes on their faces religiously.<sup>10</sup>

Language	Common Name
French	- Abrotone - Citronelle - Garde Robe: the French used the herb in wardrobes to deflect moths <sup>9</sup>
German	- Eberraute - Stabwurz
Italian	- Abrotano
Spanish	- Abrotano

Furthermore, women used the herb to keep awake during “tedious” sermons.<sup>11</sup>

The herb also had a significant, practical place in the medieval households. Maddens used the herb in large manors and palaces as “strewing herbs.” Strewing herbs were herbs placed around the house to mask the unpleasant scents that contaminated the air before personal hygiene, plumbing and sanitation existed.<sup>12</sup>

#### 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Significance:

Southernwood was first grown in upstate New York in the late 1700's. In 1789, settlers established the first white settlement in Ithaca. These gardens were very simple. The infiltration of Dutch immigrants to the area is evident in the

change in the herb's bulb variety in the area by 1869.

Southernwood was called the “meeting plant” in colonial New England for it was used as a Sunday posy (or bouquet).<sup>13</sup>

#### Uses:

Medicinally, southernwood has been used for acne, anemia, frostbite, gout, pleuritis scrofula and as an antiseptic, astringent, febrifuge, stomachic and vermifuge.<sup>14&15</sup>

Traditionally, this herb was also used as an emmenagogue (an herb which entices menstrual bleeding,) stimulant-tonic, diuretic, a worming agent (because of its close relation to wormwood) and a good wash for acne (when combined with



<sup>8</sup> O'Connor 15.

<sup>9</sup> Callery 69.

<sup>10</sup> Duke, J.A. CRC Handbook of Medicinal Herbs (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1985) 65.

<sup>11</sup> Kowalchik, C. & Hylton, W.H., Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Gardening (Emmaus: Rodale Press, 1987) 470.

<sup>12</sup> Harrop, R., Encyclopedia of Herbs (Secaucus: Chartwell Books Inc., 1977) 8.

<sup>13</sup> O'Connor 15.

<sup>14</sup> Duke, J.A., The Quest for the tolerant Germplasm: Crop Tolerance to suboptimal land conditions (Madison: ASA, CSSA, SSA, 1978) 1 – 61.

<sup>15</sup> Hartwell, J.L., Plants Used Against Cancer: A Survey (Lloydia, 1976 – 1971) 30.

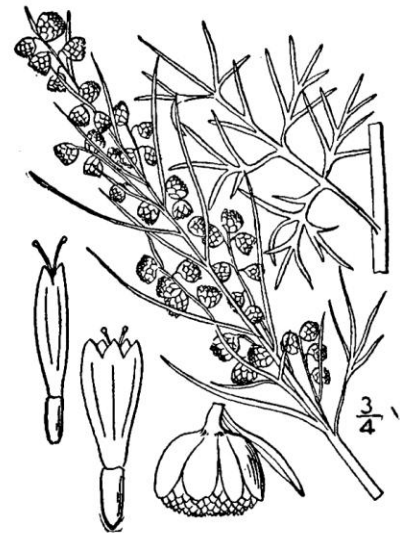
Image: “Artemesia – Southernwood Blossom.” <http://www.flickr.com/photos/buttersweet/4728580>

barley).<sup>16</sup> Older herbals advised to use the herb, when bruised, to aid in the removal of splinters.<sup>17</sup> Following previous practices, the herb is an ingredient in hair rinse for dandruff.<sup>18</sup> The herb was even used in courtrooms because people believed it prevented “prison fever.”<sup>19</sup> In the middle ages, special wines were made and used as anecdotes for people who had been poisoned; Southernwood was an ingredient in at least one such wine.<sup>20</sup> Further, it has been used to fight against coughs, tumors and cancers

Southernwood is not typically used as a culinary herb today; the herb has a very bitter taste.<sup>21</sup> The Italians used to use the herb in stuffing to flavor meat and in cakes.<sup>22</sup> It has also been used as a flavoring of beer. Further, the young shoots have previously been used to flavor puddings and pastries.<sup>23</sup>

Industrially, southernwood has several different uses. Its yellow flowers are used to dye wool yellow. It can be used as a bath aroma when added to a bath as an infusion, essential or bath oil. An infusion is very simple to make, one simply seeps the herb as you would with tea in boiling water; though, essential and bath oils require a much more complicated process.<sup>24</sup> Southernwood is also a staple in herb wreaths, baskets and as foliage for flower arrangements.

In contrast to lemon balm, southernwood’s odor is offensive to bees and thus used as a bee deterrent. When dried, the herb’s leaves act as a moth and insect repellent.<sup>25</sup> A Swedish study validates this claim, finding that southernwood showed a relatively significant repelling effect on ticks of a certain stage.<sup>26</sup> The repellent property of the herb is due to the fact that it’s essential and volatile oils contain absinthol.<sup>27</sup> One way to use the herb as a repellent is to make a sachet (a small, pulverized blend of herbs in a small bag.) Below are instructions to make a moth repellent sachet:



The sachet calls for:

Six ounces of dried southernwood

½ ounce of ground orris root (a species of *iris*)

½ ounce of a ground spice such as cloves, cinnamon or coriander

<sup>16</sup> Rose, J. Herbs & Things (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1972) 323.

<sup>17</sup> Duke, 1985, 65.

<sup>18</sup> Callery 69.

<sup>19</sup> Kowalchik 470.

<sup>20</sup> Rose 323.

<sup>21</sup> Boxer, A. & Back, P., The Herb Book (New York: Octopus/Mayflower, 1980) 110.

<sup>22</sup> Cellery 69

<sup>23</sup> Muenscher, W., Leopold, C., & Rice, M. A., Garden Spice and Wild Pot-Herbs : An American Herbal (Ithaca: Comstock Pub. Associates printing, 1955) 211.

<sup>24</sup> Harrop 28.

<sup>25</sup> Reader’s Digest Association, Magic and Medicine of Plants (Pleasantville: Reader’s Digest Association, 1986) 398.

<sup>26</sup> Thorsell, W. & Tunon, H., "Ticks Avoid Southernwood: An Orienting Study," Fauna och Flora (Stockholm: 97.2, 2002) 8-11.

<sup>27</sup> Grieve 153.

Image: Britton, N.L., Brown, A. & USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database, “*Artemisia arborantum* L. – southernwood” An illustrated flora of the northern United States, Canada and the British Possessions Vol. 3(1913) 526.

To make the sachet:

First, grind the southernwood until it resembles a powder. Then add in the spice and orris root. Store the combined mixture in a sealed container to ensure the flavors blend sufficiently and that any excess liquid is absorbed. Put the mixture into a sachet and the scent will ward off moths.<sup>28</sup>

### **Cultivation:**

Southernwood, a perennial herb that flowers in August, can propagate from root divisions or cuttings. It can re-grow yearly from the previous year's new wood. Ideal growing conditions for the herb include a Hardiness zone of 3 or 4, a soil pH of 6.7, well-drained soil and full sun light.<sup>29</sup> For best results, the herb should be planted four feet apart in the spring or fall. Southernwood needs to be pruned back in the spring because if not done, the herb will appear very "weedy"<sup>30</sup> by midsummer. A staple in an ornamental herb garden, one typically plants southernwood in the back of a border or as a hedge. This is done to emit the lovely odor of the herb when one brushes up against it. Or, the herb works as a great "filler" herb between seasonally blooming plants due to its silver/gray leaves.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Reader's Digest Association 425.

<sup>29</sup> Kowalchik 470.

<sup>30</sup> Armitage 64.

<sup>31</sup> Reader's Digest Association 400 – 401.