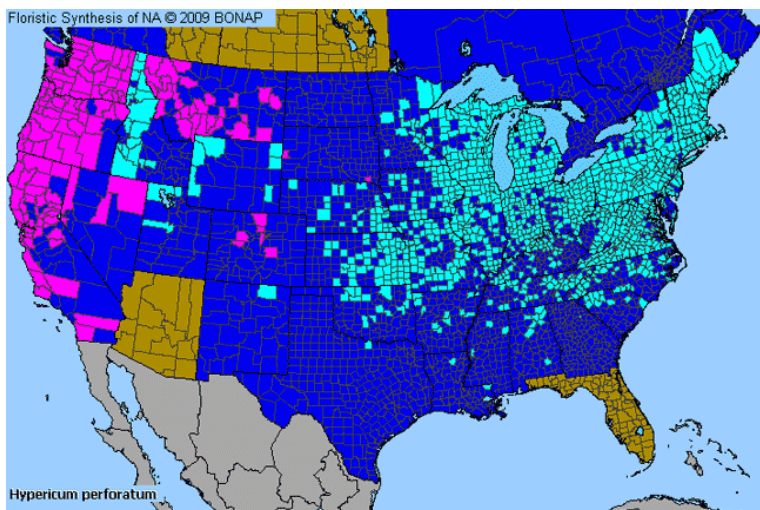


St. John's Wort by Caitlin Stoner, Autumn 2017

Common names – St. John's (or Joan's) Wort, Klamath Weed, Hypericum

**Genus species** - *Hypericum perforatum*. Here, *perforatum* refers to the small pin sized holes that can be seen in the leaves of the plant when held into the sunlight where the plant's essential oils are produced. *Hypericum* in Latin is a combination of concepts "upper" and "an image" or "apparition". This, I believe is very important when we are talking about using St. John's Wort as an anti-depressant. The words "upper" and "image", in my mind, point strongly to the concept of "clarity". Also, the feeling that I experience when taking the medicine confirms this. When we lack clarity in life, when we have difficulty making decisions and following through, when we seem to lack the will power we may have previously or never known, confusion, lack of self worth and care, ultimately depression can take over own lives. That is where, I feel, St. John's Wort can serve as a powerful antidote to the stagnation, procrastination and frustration that fuels certain types of depression.

**Areas where found**- Widely reported across the United States with the exceptions of Florida and Arizona where it is considered unreported by a 2009 study. However, both herbalist Michael Moore and our own personal studies here in Arizona confirm that St. John's Wort can indeed be found in our state. It is shown in Moore's book, *Medicinal Plants of the Mountain West*, to have been seen within a small band of land from Flagstaff to St. John's (oddly enough) and through the border of New Mexico. St. John's Wort can also be cultivated though it is now illegal to do so in Colorado because it is considered noxious in certain areas. It is considered dangerous to livestock resulting in skin lesions, vomiting, weight loss, reduced milk production, convulsions, abortion and death where the animal has eaten at least 4% of its body weight in herb during its peak blooming time and high hypericin content. Light skinned and haired animals are affected most severely.



([Pollenlibrary.com/map.aspx?map=Hypericum-perforatum.png](http://Pollenlibrary.com/map.aspx?map=Hypericum-perforatum.png))

Key:

Pink- Noxious

Dark blue-Present/Exotic

Brown-Unreported/Absent from

Area

Light blue-Waif (Does not establish itself in abundance in the wild)

**When and How to Harvest** – Gather St. John's in July through the middle of August when it is in fresh bloom with both the oily resinous buds and yellow flowers present in abundance. These flowering upper parts should be plucked from the stem and can be made into a fresh tincture (internal or topical) or oil (topical). If the plant is of good quality it should almost immediately turn the alcohol of your tincture a blood red color, a true beauty to behold. You may want to test a small batch in this manner if you are wild crafting before committing to any substantial harvest and medicine making. Dried plant material can also be used to make an infusion but will contain much less hypericin than fresh buds.

**Energetics** – When we try to classify St. John's as being specifically hot or cold energetically we have to refine our understanding of the so called hot/cold energetic spectrum. This medicine *moves* misplaced and stagnant heat from where it should not be in the body and transforms it. We can correlate Hypericum's support of phase I liver Detox with its energetic ability to remove excess heat from that specific organ. In a topical treatment it also soothes sunburn, relieving heat from the skin. So, how you feel when you take SJW may vary, it is argued to be both cooling and warming. When I take my medicine I feel a warming sensation predominantly.

SJW is astringent, diuretic, and mildly expectorant which certainly makes it a drying vs. moistening plant. In my personal experience, it seems to have eliminated the mid-cycle bleeding (excess fluid) that I had been experiencing for the year prior. This was certainly an unexpected but much welcomed effect but it seems so right that a medicine so blood red would balance the blood in me. We must also acknowledge the connection here between the health of the liver and the health of our menstruation. A low functioning liver will result in excess estrogen which of course in turn will lead to symptomatic menstruation and other health problems that affect all genders.

SJW medicine has a powerful relationship with the nervous system. With the amazing ability to actually restore nerve function by helping to heal damaged tissues. It is especially known to be helpful where anxiety driven depression is present. Therefore it is appropriate to classify this plant as being a lax or relaxing vs. tense in energetics.

Being high in tannins a Hypericum tincture will have an astringent and almost bitter flavor. It is altogether resinous and floral and if you really search for it, a little sweet. I enjoy the flavor very much myself.

## **Therapeutics**

Nerve Tonic

Nerve Pain

Tropho-restorative for nervous system (rebuilds tissue)

Anti-viral – Specific for Shingles and potentially HIV

Vulnerary (wound healing) Specific for puncture wounds and where nerves have been damaged

Supports liver detox – phase I

Anti-depressant

Alleviates symptoms of Seasonal affective disorder (SAD), PMS, and OCD

Topical for sunburn relief

Sedative

Antispasmodic

Digestive aid and gut healer

Pain relieving especially for chronic pelvic pain

Herpes management and symptom reduction

Expectorant useful where cough has been prolonged and patient is weak especially children

Urinary suppression and bed wetting for children

## **Herbal Combinations**

Consider combining St. John's Wort with:

Milky Oats, Skull Cap, Ashwaganda, Lavender, or Blue Vervain for an internal nerve tonic

Calendula, Plantain, Comfrey, Aloe, or Arnica for a topical sunburn treatment

Lemon balm for SAD or a herpes topical treatment (oral and genital)

Hops and Valerian for insomnia

Lomatium Root, Echinacea root, Olive leaf, and Lemon Balm (Herb Pharm uses this formula for their "Virattack"™ Active Responder Immune Support tincture)

## **Safety and Contraindications**

It is important to note that St. John's Wort is known to interact negatively with several pharmaceutical medications. So if you are taking any prescriptions you should check with your doctor before starting a regimen. In fact, the law of Ireland now requires that St. John's Wort be prescribed only by a doctor. Because of its strong action on the liver, blood thinners, anti-depressants (MAOIs and SSRIs), time release medications, and chemotherapy drugs could interact or be rendered ineffective. It has also been reported that the herb can disrupt the success of an organ transplant. St. John's Wort is not an appropriate treatment for depression where the patient is suicidal. It should not be used by pregnant women and may also cause photosensitivity in the extremely fair skinned where the hair follicle is visible under the skin. It is also worth mentioning that some media has reported that SJW may interfere with oral contraceptives, however, no unwanted pregnancies have ever been reported due to its use.

## **Dosage**

If you have determined that St. John's Wort is safe for you to take internally. The recommended dosage for an adult is 20-30 drops of tincture, 2-3X a day. You can add the dropper full to water or juice, best taken between meals. If you choose to make an infusion, pour one cup of hot water over 2 tsp of dried herb and drink 2 times daily.

SJW is safe for long term use, but due to its drying effect it may be wise to combine with moistening herbs when dealing with a patient who has a dry constitution.

## **Personal Experience**

I chose to work with Hypericum for many reasons. It was one of the first herbal medicines that I was introduced to in my early 20s while staying with an herbalist in a Virginia commune. She made a Vodka liqueur with the flowers which she felt mildly effective for her symptoms of depression. Almost a decade later as I'm just now deepening my relationship with herbs, my initial curiosity turned into a calling, "know this plant" my body speaks. As I learned more and looked down the list of actions that this herbal medicine can perform, I saw myself in so many ways. I'm still recovering from a 6 month period of intensely symptomatic Guillan-Barré Syndrome which damaged my nerves so I am very much looking forward to seeing what continuing a SJW and other nervines can do for my lingering areas of weakness. I have also struggled with mild to moderate depression and SAD in my adult years and had been actively seeking liver detox and gut healing as I have always suspected that my poor digestive health along with periods of poor diet were fueling my negative thoughts and emotions.

This past July, while visiting a lovely garden farm in Durango, Colorado I had the good fortune to harvest enough St. John's Wort to make a fresh grain alcohol tincture and after processing it, starting taking the tincture but placing just a single drop of the stunning red liquid on my tongue. After getting acquainted, I increased the dosage and currently I am taking a full dropper 2-3 times a day. I noticed right away that the joyful quality in the energy I received from St. John's. One of the most notable sensations was a rising yet soothing energy from my solar plexus to the space above my crown. Now, I have to say here that I have also been taking a commercially produced St. John's Wort tincture and it just isn't the same. The flavor is pale in comparison and

doesn't have the same energetic power. So while there is certainly nothing wrong with buying a tincture I would urge you, if you are in need of healing and are interested in wild crafting, go do it. Find your medicine and make it with your own hands and heart and mind. Just like the tomatoes grown in your own back yard, nothing else compares. I believe that nature responds to us. If you talk to your tomatoes and peppers and the apple tree, they will bear fruits especially for you. If you learn the medicine of your place and commune with the plants from whom you make your medicine, the plants will respond in kind.

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