

# Plant "Imagination"

## *Comfrey Symphytum officinale*



Comfrey (*Symphytum* spp.) has been cultivated and valued by many cultures for almost 2500 years. A native to Europe and Asia, the comfrey plant with which most are familiar, *Symphytum officinale*, has been used as a blood coagulant, a treatment for maladies of the lung, and as a poultice to aid in the healing of wounds and broken bones. Consumed as a tea, comfrey is said to treat a variety of internal ailments by various folk medicine traditions.

The word comfrey is Latin in origin and means "to grow together". Though research has recently linked the consumption of comfrey with liver damage in mice, thus halting the development of comfrey as a modern food crop, the plant was once widely grown for its medicinal, food and forage value. Today it is still valued for its use in salves and other topical skin preparations and for its use as animal fodder and fertilizer.

A fast-growing, herbaceous, perennial plant of the borage family, comfrey's thick and tuberous roots create an expansive root system, allowing the plant to "mine" compacted soils for minerals and other nutrients which are often difficult for other plants to obtain. It is this ability to help cycle nutrients through the soil that has given comfrey its designation as a dynamic accumulator plant. Like daikon, stinging nettles, and other plants that function as dynamic accumulators, comfrey leaves make an excellent fertilizer, and provide a nutrient boost to compost mixes. Additionally, comfrey leaves are used as a green manure and mulch, being cut, then spread over planting beds and left to decompose on site, further helping to condition soils. Cutting and placing the first flush of comfrey leaves in trenches where potatoes are to be planted is thought to provide the tubers with nutrients that will result in an increased yield. It is important to use only the leaves of the plant when mulching, as any cut stems have the potential to take root.