



**WILD ROSE**  
College of Herbal Medicine

# St. John's Wort

## *Hypericum perforatum*

Introduced  
to North  
America



**Description/Harvesting:** St. John's Wort is a herbaceous plant with a perennial, woody creeping root. The stem is dual edged, branching and erect above, curled below, 3 - 6 cm in height. The leaves are numerous, elliptical or ovate, obtuse, opposite, entire, pale green in color and with pellucid dots. The flowers are numerous, bright yellow, densely forked and with terminal panicles. The flowers or top 1/3 of the plant are harvested when in bloom.

**History and Folklore:** The history behind the name St. John's wort is wonderful in itself. The reason this European native herb is called St. John's wort is because it first flowers on St. John's Day, right before the summer solstice. Fortunately, it continues to flower all summer long, so we don't have to be in a hurry to harvest it. The flowering at such an auspicious time was not lost on the medieval Catholic peasants. When viewed from the top (not the side) the small stems create a perfect cross. This symbolism became attached to the plant and the peasant folks came to believe the plant offered protection for everything from lightning to witch craft. The scientific name *Hypericum perforatum* is also highly symbolic. The genus name comes from the Greek word hypericon, meaning to place "above the icon." This attribute was popularized in the Middle Ages, when the herb was considered to protect people against demons, witchcraft and lightning. If you hold the leaf up to the sunlight, you can see little perforations in it - hence the species name *perforatum*. This phenomenon suggested its use for pin and needles

### **Other names:**

Klamath weed,  
John's wort, amber  
touch-and-heal,  
millepertuis,  
goatweed, rosin  
rose.

### **Family:**

Hypericaceae

**Parts Used:** Herb  
top, flower

### **Taste & Energetics:**

bitter, sweet and  
astringent, with a  
cool, dry property

**Actions:** Aromatic,  
astringent,  
resolvent,  
expectorant and  
nervine.

This is an excerpt of our full plant monograph which is available to members of the Herbal Village