

These folios are intended to offer brief and concise information about the preparation and uses of North American botanicals...to encourage the viewing of our herbs as LIVING PLANTS, not merely abstract roughage purchased in commerce, derived from sources mysterious

Southwest  
School of  
Botanical  
Medicine



MEDICINAL PLANT FOLIO

# Pedicularis

## (Betony/Lousewort)

Prepared by Michael Moore

**Pedicularis spp.** (Betony, Wood Betony, Lousewort, Elephant's Head, Parrot's Beak, Indian Warrior, etc.etc.)

This circumboreal genus of "Scrophs" (*Scrophulariaceae* Family) has racemes of showy and distinctive flowers that lend themselves easily to anthropomorphic interpretations. Nearly all species are found in the cool and mountainous regions of the Northern Hemisphere, with the greatest diversity found in the tundra and transcontinental forests.

New Mexico, on the southern edge of the Cordillera, has five or six species of *Pedicularis*...Alaska as something like twenty species.



*Pedicularis contorta*, a variable species from the Northern Rockies  
Photo by Mimi Kamp



*Pedicularis grayii*, found in the Southern Rockies. Two flower variations are shown  
Photos by Mimi Kamp and Michael Moore

Nearly ALL of the North American Betonys are predominantly or partially root parasites. Gathering them for medicinal use entails a careful assessment as to what, if anything, the plants are growing on. Plants growing on *Senecios* will uptake senecio alkaloids...and be toxic. Plants found growing on legumes such as *Thermopsis* will be found to have the pharmacokinetics of *Pedicularis* AND *Thermopsis*. This phenomenon is known by range-management folks, but is generally missed by NatProdChem folks...I get a kick out of reading constituent reports on this genus...with some data showing high levels of gallo-tannins (from Oaks), Senecionine (from Ragworts), cineole (from Pines or Firs), etc. I shudder to think about some poor chemotaxonomist that stumbles onto this genus and DOESN'T know about their constituent uptakes...how many chemical taxas could come from a single mountainside???

Underneath this are the *Pedicularis* constituents...what we want and what it does.

NOTE: Like *Vaccinium* or *Datura*, different strains of the same species can vary a great deal in relative strength. Eating some of the fresh plant of a strong strain will offer a mild muscular-skeletal lethargy. If you try this at 10,000 feet, five miles in from the trailhead, you will just have to sit down for a couple of hours and giggle...you ain't goin nowhere for awhile..



*Pedicularis groenlandica* or Elephant's Head. Found in meadows and snow bogs throughout Western North America in giddy pink profusion. Seldom parasitic.

Photo by Mimi Kamp

**PLANT PART**..... The herb in flower

**PREPARATION:**

**Standard Infusion**

Dosage..... 4-8 ounces to 3X a day

Topically as a fomentation

**Tincture**..... **Fresh Plant, 1:2**

**Tincture**..... **Dry Plant, 1:5, 50% alcohol**

Dosage..... 1-2 teaspoons, also to 3X a day

**STABILITY:** The dried herb should retain its relative strength for up to two years.

**CONTRAINDICATIONS:** None

**SIDE EFFECTS:** Large amounts of a potent strain can induce a safe but peculiar goofiness and physical lethargy

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**SPECIFIC INDICATIONS::**

- Insomnia from exhaustion following excitement or Flight/Fight episode.
- Insomnia caused by muscular “jolts” when falling asleep
- Insomnia at first REM cycle, with agitation, fear or gastritis.
- Muscular pain, especially from excess training or exertion..
- Sprains, aggravated by sharp muscle spasms.
- Joint and muscle pain, especially in children.
- For use with bodywork or physical therapy, to help prevent reverting to pattern
- Nocturnal cramps in a single muscle group; use internally and externally
- As a “Treatment Preparer” for Rolfing, myotherapy or muscle repatterning.
- Adjunct to neck adjustments, TMJ or Alexander work to lessen tonic resistance
- To lessen sensation (not cause) of nocturnal pruritis from liver or thyroid dysfunction, combined with a good Scutellaria preparation.



*Pedicularis racemosa* - Parrot’s Beak. Frequently parasitic on Firs and Spruce... widespread, with flowers varying from bright yellow (southern range) to creamy-white (more common) **Photo by Mimi Kamp**



*Pedicularis parryi*, found in lower altitudes of the southwest and central west United States. Often found growing on Thermopsis and Prunus spp.  
**Photo by Michael Moore**

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