



“Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays
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Coltsfoot: Why I Love It and You Shouldn't

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Having been diving through the internet and ending up with a sheaf of papers on the plant, (we'll get to those in a second), I must say I have no interest in eating, smoking or ingesting coltsfoot.



I love this little wildflower and search for it every spring because, you know, it's the first to flower. Well . . . all right, snowdrops, daffodils and even my hyacinths pop up first but the One who brings this flower to my yard doesn't have to plant any bulbs. They just appear.

Coltsfoot goes by many names including but not limited to Ass's Foot, British Tobacco, Bullsfoot, Foal's Foot, Foalswort, Hallfoot, Horsefoot, Horsehoof, and a number of foreign words. Nothing I've found suggests any connection to horse or ass and, as to what the British smoked, well, I doubt if they were ever that desperate.

Coltsfoot is called invasive as well as perennial which means you might as well enjoy it because you aren't going to get rid of it. I have some near the house which I treasure. Admittedly (now that I'm remembering), I have plenty in my so-called bedroom garden which, no matter how hard – or how long – I dig, will never fully go away.

Oh, well. Let's enjoy that first harbinger of a long-awaited spring.

In the daisy family, coltsfoot resembles a short dandelion: big-headed middles with yellow rays sprouting out on all sides. Peterson calls it an alien (as is the dandelion in his estimation) growing in waste places, roadsides and railroad shoulders. Hmm, somehow my backyard got in there as well. For all the times I've seen this plant, I can't say I've noticed the reddish scales on the stalk. (Perhaps it's just the lo-o-o-ong winter since I'm writing this in early – very – March.) Bet they'll seem very familiar when I begin to dig once more. (The ones near the house stay; nothing else wants to grow there but the ones in the garden – well, my battle with them will continue.)

This is a native to Europe and parts of Asia so it had to be introduced into North America. Now that it's here, it has no intention of vamoosing. Newcomb also describes the roundly





heart-shaped leaves that are shallowly lobed. (Yellow dandelion-like flower heads about 1" wide, if you don't know.) Newcomb also has a Sweet Coltsfoot but the leaves, long-stalked and deeply cleft, are totally different. One thing that makes this plant unusual is that the flowers appear before the leaves. For this reason it has also been called "filius ante patrem" which, for you a little rusty on your Latin, means "the son before the father."

Being an herby wildflower must mean somebody's discovered great things to do with eating, chewing or stewing it. Indeed there are – lots – but my

suggestion is to forget about it. Test-tube and animal studies (animals, dear readers, mostly mice, NOT us!) indicate it can be a natural remedy for lung conditions like asthma, bronchitis and whooping cough. It can also be used to treat upper respiratory complaints including sore mouth and throat, cough and hoarseness. inflammatory conditions like asthma and gout. I repeat: animals. And I quote: human research is needed. Please don't be a guinea pig.

The internet stresses that coltsfoot is CONSIDERED UNSAFE. So please, no tea, no inhaling, so nothing. It's known to cause birth defects and liver damage, increased blood pressure, heart disease and liver damage. Coltsfoot might also slow blood clotting. Taking coltsfoot along with medications that also slow clotting (aspirin, ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin, naproxen, Coumadin and others) could increase the chances of bruising and bleeding. And, should you be allergic to ragweed and its relatives, beware of an additional allergic reaction. I did find it interesting that ragweed is part of the Asteraceae/Compositae family which includes chrysanthemums, marigolds, daisies and many others so you may well be allergic to all.



Now go back and reread the two preceding paragraphs. Please. Nothing you might try to treat with it is worth the potential damage. Really.

I don't know, after reading all this, if I'd even suggest picking it. Why bother? It's tiny and better flowers will be coming along soon.

I'll bet on that.

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