

Leonotis leonurus - Lion's Tail

- Labiatae - South Africa



Wild Dagga (*Leonotis leonurus*) is a shrubby, semi-woody, perennial or a semi-evergreen subshrub that gets up to 6' tall with a spread of 2-3'. Lion's ear has numerous erect, straight stems that bear whorled clusters of orange-red, two-lipped, tubular flowers from summer until early winter. Each flower is about 2" long and the rounded clusters about 4" across. The clusters are arranged on the stems one above another. The flowers are densely hairy on the outside of the tube, and said to resemble the ear of a lion. Like most mints, lion's ear has opposite leaves and the herbaceous (non-woody) new growth has stems that are square in cross section. The leaves are mildly fragrant and linear to lance-shaped, 2-4" long, with scalloped margins. It is common and widespread throughout South Africa and grows amongst rocks in grassland.

Ongoing research at the CBGTEP suggests that these little-known herbs may also be useful as a calming tea. In South Africa, the leaves and roots of the plant are also used as a remedy for snake bite and to alleviate the pain of other bites and stings. The decoction of dried leaf or root is used as an external wash to treat itchy skin and eczema. Internally, the tea of the dried leaves is taken to treat headache, bronchitis, high blood pressure and the common cold. The plant contains volatile oils and marrubiin.

Many traditional uses have been recorded. The leaves or roots are widely used as a remedy for snakebite and also to relieve other bites and stings. Extracts have been applied externally to treat boils, eczema, skin diseases, itching and muscular cramps. Extracts are also used to relieve coughs, cold and influenza, as well as bronchitis, high blood pressure and headaches. Leaf infusions have been used to treat asthma and viral hepatitis.

TRADITIONAL PREPARATION: Hottentot tribes smoke the resinous flowering tops and leaves from this plant as a euphoriant. Caution should be used as this plant is rumored to be mildly addictive.