

English Plantain

Plantago lanceolata

Legend has it that English plantain springs up wherever English people set foot, no matter what the climate. This herbaceous perennial plant consists of a rosette of basal leaves and one or more flowering stalks. The slender gray-green basal leaves are 5-10" long with 3-5 parallel veins along the length of each leaf; there are usually a few hairs along the central vein on the underside of each leaf.

The leafless flowering stalks are 6-18" tall and each terminates in an oblong spike of flowers about ½-2" long. The small flowers are densely crowded together, facing in all directions and blooming from the bottom to the top. The stamens are the most conspicuous feature of the flowers. The blooming period occurs intermittently from late spring to early fall and can last several months. Having no scent, the flowers are pollinated by the wind. This plant spreads primarily by reseeding itself.



Sometimes small bees collect pollen from the anthers, while Syrphid flies feed on the pollen. The caterpillars of the Buckeye Butterfly and several moths feed on the foliage while the seeds are eaten by the Grasshopper Sparrow and possibly other songbirds. The Cottontail Rabbit, White-Tailed Deer, and domesticated cattle occasionally eat the foliage, even though it is rather bitter and stringy.

English Plantain is known to contain high concentration of potassium and combat inflammation. The Smoky Valley Shoshones used the plant to make poultices for battle wounds and bruises. American pioneers sprinkled plantain tea on webs to kill spiders. English Plantain has been used to treat all types of respiratory problems, especially those involving mucous congestion. Other uses include treatment for diarrhea, nosebleed, kidney and bladder trouble, jaundice, headache, hepatitis, bedwetting, sciatica, tuberculosis, syphilis, snakebites, worms, toothache, dropsy, blood poisoning, excessive menses, and inflamed eyes. Externally, the fresh leaves are crushed to treat all manner of skin injuries (cuts, burns, ulcers) or eruptions (eczema, ringworm, boils, shingles); rubbing crushed leaves into the area around the site of insect stings will prevent swelling and itching

English Plantain thrives in soils that are heavy and contain clay. Look for this plant in sunny areas of our Avenbury Lakes property where the soil remains a bit moist.