

Coltsfoot – The Soothing Lung Ally & Breath Restorer

Botanical Profile

- Latin Name: *Tussilago farfara*
- Alternative Names: Coughwort, Horsehoof, Bull's Foot
- Plant Family: Asteraceae
- Parts Used: Flowers and Leaves
- Origin: Native to Europe and parts of Asia; now naturalised in North America

Coltsfoot is one of the most ancient and revered respiratory herbs in Western herbalism. With its bright yellow blooms appearing even before its leaves, it signals new breath and relief from harsh winter lungs. At Peridotflow, we turn to Coltsfoot when the breath is shallow, dry, or raspy—offering its softening touch to irritated respiratory tissues and weary lungs.

Soothes Dry, Irritated Coughs and Throat

Coltsfoot is a premier demulcent herb for the respiratory system, offering a mucilaginous coating that soothes dry, tickly, or hacking coughs. It brings quick comfort to throats that feel raw, scratchy, or inflamed. This makes it especially helpful in dry, unproductive coughs, chronic bronchitis, and exposure to smoke or dry air. Coltsfoot helps re-moisten the lungs and reduce the urge to cough, especially when irritation rather than infection is the root.

Supports Lung Recovery and Chronic Conditions

Used traditionally as a lung tonic, Coltsfoot helps repair respiratory tissue after long-term irritation or damage. It can be helpful in conditions like chronic bronchitis, emphysema, or post-viral coughs. Its gentle nature allows for long-term rebuilding rather than acute intervention, and is often paired with herbs like Mullein or Marshmallow root in restorative lung blends.

Eases Spasmodic and Nervous Coughs

Coltsfoot has mild antispasmodic properties, helping calm reflexive or nervous coughs where the throat feels tight and the lungs overreact. It's particularly useful when coughing is worsened by emotional tension, cold exposure, or dryness. Its soothing effect can help relax the respiratory tract and reduce coughing fits, making it suitable for sensitive constitutions and children.

Moistens and Softens Dry Lung Tissue

Coltsfoot is classified as a moistening demulcent, restoring hydration to parched lung tissues. It is ideal for individuals with atrophic tissue states—those who are dry, depleted, and tense.

In Vitalist herbalism, it's used when the lungs have lost tone and lubrication, allowing for easier, deeper breathing and improved tissue resilience.

Clears Mucus and Soothes Irritation

Though primarily moistening, Coltsfoot also possesses mild expectorant qualities, helping loosen stuck mucus and soothe inflamed mucosal membranes. It provides balance—moistening dryness without encouraging excess dampness. This makes it ideal for lingering mucus after dry cough phases or during seasonal transitions when lungs feel irritated and congested.

Folklore & History

Coltsfoot was historically painted on the signs of apothecaries in Europe, a symbol of its revered place in respiratory healing. Its Latin name 'Tussilago' means 'cough dispeller'. In folklore, it was smoked like tobacco to relieve asthma and coughs, and made into syrups for chest ailments. Coltsfoot flowers were associated with rebirth and resilience—blooming even through snow, they were seen as symbols of hope and renewed breath.

Traditional Usage

Traditionally taken as an infusion, syrup, tincture, or in herbal smoking blends. Leaves were often dried and added to smoking mixtures to ease wheezing or tight lungs. Also used topically in poultices for skin irritations.

Herbal Actions

Demulcent, Antitussive, Expectorant (mild), Antispasmodic, Emollient

Energetics & Tissue States

Temperature: Cooling

Moisture: Moistening

Tissue States: Dry, Atrophic, Tense, Irritated

Active Compounds

- Mucilage – soothes and coats mucous membranes
- Flavonoids – anti-inflammatory
- Triterpenes – tissue support
- Pyrrolizidine alkaloids – present in small quantities; see safety notes

Dosage & Preparation

- Tea (infusion): 1 tsp dried leaf or flower per cup, steep 10–15 mins
- Tincture: 1–3 ml up to 3x daily
- Syrup: Often used for soothing children's coughs
- Smoking blends: Used in moderation for temporary support

Safety & Contraindications

- Contains small amounts of pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs) – limit long-term use
- Avoid during pregnancy and breastfeeding
- Do not exceed recommended dosage or use continuously for more than 4–6 weeks without supervision
- Use only organically sourced and PA-free certified products where possible

Herbal Pairings

- Mullein – for lung structure and tone
- Marshmallow Root – enhanced demulcency
- Elecampane – deeper expectorant support
- Licorice – harmonising and anti-inflammatory
- Thyme – for antimicrobial balance

Peridotflow Perspective

Coltsfoot arrives when breath is thin and comfort is needed. We reach for her when the lungs feel stripped and strained, when every breath feels dry or distant. She brings a softening balm to hard places, coaxing back a full exhale and the return of calm. At Peridotflow, we honour her as a humble yet powerful ally—one who gives voice back to the breath and rest to the weary.