Bear’s Breeches

*Acanthus mollis* Acanthaceae

**Botanical description** **:** This plant is a perennial which grows up to a metre high. It has a branched black tap root and long spikes of mauve white flowers reminiscent of the spinal column. The leaves are up to a metre long. It is native to mainland Europe is widely grown asa garden ornamental, preferring low lying ground and damp sites and will happily grow in the shade.

**Part used** : Leaves and roots

**Cultivation/Harvesting** Propagated from seed sown in the spring or by division. The leaves are gathered in early summer and the roots are harvested in the autumn

**History/Folklore/Taste/Energetics**

We seem to be working quite a bit with bear medicine at the moment; the osha vinegar went in the stir fry yesterday and on the roasted root vegetables for lunch today (they got some rosemary sprigs and garlic cloves and sea salt as well). Osha grows in the Northern US and we have never tried growing it here. However, this plant, known as Bears Breeches (Acanthus mollis), grows very happily in the garden here. The leaves inspired the leaf shape on Doric columns in ancient Greece. It is quite widely grown as a garden plant which has magnificent large leaves and is happy growing in shady areas. It can spread a little, but then the plants that do that are often begging to be used more. If you squeeze open the tightly formed flowers then the inner parts look just like a wee pink/purple badger, seriously they really do, or maybe a bear peeping out. The large flower spikes are most reminiscent of a healthy spine with the vertebrae and joints perfectly in alignment and properly spaced (ok they sometimes get a bit wiggly here on account of the wind). It is a plant that really seems to draw people to it and then when they ask what is does they smile. So the roots of the plant help to realign dislocated or subluxated joints and at the same time help repair damaged nerves. A paste made from its roots helps to relax and tighten the muscles and ligaments around the joint , facilitating re-alignment, that is pretty cool. The leaf is more used to soothe irritation in the digestion and in the urinary system, similar to marshmallow or plantain or several others. I have found just sitting with the plant has helped with spinal subluxations and once it is a little more awake I want to try using some poultices too . This plant really does deserve more recognition as one that grows splendidly in our climate (not a native but very happy here). Bees adore feeding on it, especially the bumble bees. I remember dreaming of being a young tiny child and crawling in under the massive leaves which hug down to the ground, sitting in the cool moist shade and feeling very happy there; they look a little bedraggled at the present as you can see, but they will revive once Spring arrives properly.

**Constituents** Mucilage and tannins so moistening but astringing at the same time. Defintely cooling.

**Actions :** Emollient and demulcent

**Traditional and current uses:**

* As a poultice for dislocated or subluxated joints
* Externally ti treat burns
* Hot irritated skin conditions
* Internally to soothe heal repair and protect the lining of the digestive system and the urinary tract

**Recipes and Formulae**