

## Agrimony *Agimonia eupatoria*

### What's in a name?

The name Agrimony comes from the Greek word 'Argemone', describing plants which were used for healing irritation of the eyes. It is also known as 'church steeple', a reflection of the tall spire like flower spike. The bristly fruits often stick to any animals and clothing. Many dog owners see it as a nuisance but the agricultural community looked on this from a more romantic perspective, earning the nickname 'sweethearts'. One other country name is 'sticklewort' which is a direct reference to the sticky seed pods.

### Botany & Ecology

This perennial plant is found across much of the UK. It thrives on calcareous (chalky) soils and is often found along field margins, roadside verges, hedges and the edges of woodland. The size of the upright flowering spike varies considerably. On average, the spike or steeple is 4-6" tall but the whole plant can grow up to 2 feet with a dense base of leaves.

The leaves close to the ground are 7" or 8" long and are rounded with a relatively smooth edge. The leaves higher up are finger shaped with a more jagged edge and are no longer than 3".

The plant flowers between June and September, with many small yellow flowers appearing on the spike. Because of its shape, the plant is quite easy to spot. The flowers contain five rounded petals and have no stalk. The flowers are attractive to all kinds of pollinators, particularly the small tortoiseshell and red admiral butterflies.



### Folklore

Throughout the 15th and 16th centuries it was common for agricultural communities to make a wreath of agrimony flowers and place it on a person's head, or place a bunch of flowers under an insomniac's pillow. This apparently induced a deep sleep and the person would only awaken when the flowers were removed.

In addition, witches used the plant to protect themselves against enemies or the spells of others, and would send spells or hexes back to their original sender. Agrimony was also used to cleanse a place or property of negative energy and spirits.

### Folk Medicine

This plant was used to cure or relieve many ailments. It was not until the 17th century, when medical practitioners started to write their instructions down, did we understand what form this first aid took. It appears that the plant was crushed, mixed with animal fat and applied as an ointment. This ointment was used to heal ulcers and draw out splinters. The Egyptians, Greeks and Medieval monks would crush it, drain off the sap and, once diluted with water, would apply it in small droplets to sore eyes, to make them bright and shiny. The Anglo Saxons used it to stem bleeding on the battlefield.

Like honeysuckle, agrimony was prescribed to detoxify the liver, kidneys and bladder especially if the patient was suffering with kidney stones.

Agrimony is currently undergoing a revival within herbal medicine. It is still prescribed to heal ulcers, wounds, sore throats, urinary tract illnesses and digestive issues.

