

# Herbal and Traditional Medicine in Gozo

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There is no doubt about the natural beauty of the Island of Gozo. As some people call it, it's a diamond in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Apart from its importance for tourism, gastronomy, culture and rural environment, Gozo has also a hidden secret. This is the secret of Herbal and Natural Medicine that has been used successfully though the years especially by some local farmers that acquired this precious information through the years. One of the most famous names in Gozo is Francis Xavier Mercieca, more commonly known as Frenč tal-Għarb, a gentleman that used herbs to heal people. I have admired greatly Frenč tal-Għarb, both for his simple life, humbleness as well as his vast knowledge in natural medicine and spirituality.

As a scientist specialising in biochemistry and natural medicine, I am very curious about this knowledge and great powers of these botanicals. As they say; just by listening to nature, you will learn a lot; and I truly believe in this. While in Gozo, I also like to listen to a number of stories about the successful use of these herbal medicines. Thus, in this brief article, I would like to list and describe some common botanicals that are found on the Island of Gozo and try to describe briefly their medical importance.

In order to make things a bit simpler, I will list and describe the botanicals according to their uses, and for this article I will be describing gastrointestinal, dermatological, respiratory and urinary tract disorders.

## 1. Gastrointestinal Disorders.

*Borago officinals* L. – **Fidloqqom** – Borage  
*Ceratonía siliqua* L. – **Harrub** – Carob  
*Citrus limon* L.B. – **Lumi** – Lemon  
*Cynodon dactylon* L. – **Nigem** – Bermuda Grass or Dog's Tooth Couch Grass  
*Foeniculum vulgare* Mill. – **Busbies** – Fennel  
*Malva sylvestris* L. – **Hubbejza** – Common Mallow, High Mallow

## 2. Skin Disorders.

*Borago officinals* L. – **Fidloqqom** – Borage  
*Dittrichia viscosa* L. – **Tullier** – False Yellow Head  
*Hordeum vulgare* L. – **Xghir** – Barley  
*Matricaria chamomilla* L. – **Kammomila salvaġġa** – Wild Chamomile  
*Ruta chalepensis* L. – **Fejġel** – Wall Rue or Wild Rue  
*Malva sylvestris* L. – **Hubbejza** – Common Mallow, High Mallow  
*Urtica dubia* Forsk. – **Hurrieq** – Large-leaved Nettle  
*Verbena officinalis* L. – **Buquxrum** – Vervain  
*Vitis vinifera* L. – **Dielja tal-Gheneb** – Grapevine

## 3. Respiratory disorders.

*Borago officinals* L. – **Fidloqqom** – Borage  
*Ceratonía siliqua* L. – **Harrub** – Carob  
*Citrus limon* L.B. – **Lumi** – Lemon  
*Hordeum vulgare* L. – **Xghir** – Barley  
*Rosmarinus officinalis* L. – **Klin** – Rosemary  
*Vitis vinifera* L. – **Dielja tal-Gheneb** – Grapevine

## 4. Urinary tract disorders.

*Cynodon dactylon* L. – **Nigem** – Bermuda Grass or Dog's Tooth Couch Grass  
*Hordeum vulgare* L. – **Xghir** – Barley  
*Micromeria microphylla* (D'Urv) Benth. – **Xkattapietra** – Small leaved Micromeria  
*Zea mays* L. – **Qamh ir-Rum** – Maize

## Medicinal Species and Uses

1. *Borago officinals* L. – **Fidloqqom** – Borage  
A common plant from autumn till spring. Its flowers are upside down, blue in colour but black with white on the inside. Some of its medicinal properties that have been reported include for cold and bronchitis, helps with cough, diuretic, helps to increase breast milk, heals inflamed skin, and raised skin bumps.



*Borago officinalis* L. – **Fidloqqom** – Borage.

2. *Ceratonia siliqua* L. – **Harrub** – Carob

Although carob is used as animal feeds, it is widely used for coughs. It is also a good source of proteins and carbohydrates.



*Ceratonia siliqua* L. – **Harrub** – Carob.

3. *Citrus limon* L.B. – **Lumi** – Lemon

Lemon is used widely in our everyday cooking. Some of its medicinal benefits includes the amelioration of cough and circulation problems. Its juice can be used for some dermatological problems such as skin infections, warts, corns and calluses. Lemon juice is also a good source of vitamin C and also a disinfectant.



*Citrus limon* L.B. – **Lumi** – Lemon.

4. *Cynodon dactylon* L. – **Nigem** – Bermuda Grass or Dog's Tooth Couch Grass.

A very common plant that grows below the soil surface and has its flowers in the shape of birds' feet. This plant is a good diuretic and helps with urine problems, colds, flu, and helps to control blood pressure.



*Cynodon dactylon* L. – **Nigem** – Bermuda Grass or Dog's Tooth Couch Grass.

5. *Dittrichia viscosa* L. – **Tullier** – False Yellow Head

A very common plant that has aromatic leaves that are very sticky, and yellow flowers. This plant is a very good diuretic, helping with skin problems such as itching, used with oil for pains, venereal diseases, and to help vision.



*Dittrichia viscosa* L. – **Tullier** – False Yellow Head.

6. *Micromeria microphylla* (D'Urv) Benth. – **Xkattapietra** – Small leaved Micromeria

It's a very small, thin plant with white, pink or violet flowers. As its name suggests, this plant has long been used for the removal of renal and gall bladder stones. It is also commonly used as a diuretic.



*Micromeria microphylla* (D'Urv) Benth. – **Xkattapietra** – Small leaved Micromeria.

7. *Foeniculum vulgare* Mill. – **Bużbież** – Fennel

Fennel is a very common plant. Some of its medicinal properties include: anti-inflammatory, diuretic, helps with milk production and menstrual pains, and helps to remove stomach gas and bloating. The leaves can also be used to help with skin acne.



*Foeniculum vulgare* Mill. – **Bużbież** – Fennel.

8. *Hordeum murinum* L. – **Xghir** – Barley

Barley is usually cultivated. Apart from being used in food, the water used to boil the barley in has a number of medicinal benefits including reduces inflammation of the skin, helps with sore throat, and helps with urinary tract infection.



*Hordeum murinum* L. – **Xghir** – Barley.

9. *Malva sylvestris* L., – **Hubbejza** – Common Mallow, High Mallow

There are a number of species that have similar plants and leaves. In natural medicine, this plant is commonly used against tooth pain, to help relieve from cough, sore throat, urinary tract infections, and upset stomach.



*Malva sylvestris* L., – **Hubbejza** – Common Mallow, High Mallow.

10. *Matricaria chamomilla* L. – **Kammomila salvaġġa** – Wild Chamomile

This plant is found in the wild and has white flowers and a very distinctive smell. It is claimed that Kammomila salvaġġa cures stomach upset, stomach ulcers, skin rash and burning, varicose veins, eye inflammations, is antiseptic, and promotes sleep, asthma, sore throat, tooth and ear aches and tape worm.



*Matricaria chamomilla* L. – **Kammomila salvaġġa** – Wild chamomile.

11. *Rosmarinus officinalis* L. – **Klin** – Rosemary  
Although in the wild it is not so common anymore, it is widely cultivated especially in public gardens. Some of its medicinal properties include actions against upset stomach, bad breath, colds and flu, promotes hair growth, muscle relaxant, helps with

pain, blood circulation, cleans liver, increases blood pressure, and good antiseptic.



*Rosmarinus officinalis* L. – **Klin** – Rosemary.

12. *Ruta chalepensis* L. – **Fejġel** – Wall Rue or Wild Rue

This plant has a very strong smell and has yellow flowers. Some of its medicinal properties include: skin disorders and injuries such as burns, inflammation, cuts and bruises, rheumatism, ear aches, upset stomach, promotes teeth and bone formation, and helps during epilepsy.



*Ruta chalepensis* L. – **Fejġel** – Wall Rue or Wild Rue.

13. *Urtica dubia* Forsk. – **Hurrieq** – Large-leaved nettle

This plant is very popular since it has an irritating substance. Some of its medicinal properties include: dry feet, helps with bronchitis, promotes and strengthens hair, nails and teeth, helps diabetes, increases milk flow, helps with nerve pain and inflammation, helps with sun burns, and helps with urine problems.



*Urtica dubia* Forsk. – **Hurrieq** – Large-leaved Nettle.

14. *Verbena officinalis* L. – **Buqexrem** – Vervain

This plant is not so common anymore, it has branching long stems with small purple flowers. Its medicinal properties include treatment for varicose veins, cough, skin injuries and infections, inflammation and nerve pains, diabetes, blood iron deficiency, and fever.



*Verbena officinalis* L. – **Buqexrem** – Vervain.

15. *Vitis vinifera* L. – **Dielja tal-Gheneb** – Grapevine

Some the medicinal properties from boiled leaves include treatment of stomach upsets, increases metabolism, hormonal menopause control, weight control, eye problems, and skin acne.

16. *Zea mays* L. – **Qamh ir-Rum** – Maize

This plant is mostly cultivated. Its medicinal properties include: helps with urine and kidney infections, helps to control diabetes, antiseptic properties, used against acid build up in gout and to wash haemorrhoids.

Some of these plants, although without any doubts have great medicinal properties, have also toxic properties, thus one should be careful and knowledgeable about their use and also quantities to be used in combination with other medicinal plants. These medicinal plants, can also interact with medicinal products, so it is recommended to seek medical advice.

In life, I am always curious and like to learn about new things, apart from always keeping busy. As part of my ongoing research, I am interested in phytochemicals of local species of mushrooms, and hopefully will be able to write and an article in the future about the medical properties of such mushrooms, which they too are found in Gozo. Thus, whoever has any knowledge they would like to share or an old curious story about their medicinal use, I would be more than happy to listen and to learn.

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