

PART F

CULTIVATION AND PRODUCTIVITY OF COMFREY

Chapter 34

Care of Plant Overview and How to Propagate

General Care of Plant

“Chas. Drake, Cattle Inspector on Tambracherry Coffee Estates in Wynaard, Malabar Coast (southern part of India’s western coast), October 1876:

*Thus far I am glad to be able to report most favourably on the progress of the **Prickly Comfrey** roots I brought out with me. I have had them planted on a low marshy soil, in ridges three feet (0.9 meter) apart, taking care, previously, to have the soil broken up two or three feet (0.6-0.9 meter) deep, and at subsoil of the ridges making a good coating of cattle manure mixed with jungle soil.*

*By this cultivation the roots will not only have considerable depth of soil to grow in, but in the event of having a dry season, the manure being placed at fair depth under the top soil, will tend to make it moist for a very considerable time. I was greatly surprised at the quick germinating qualities of these Comfrey roots, which in several instances had not been planted more than forty-eight hours, **at about three to four inches (7.6-10.1 cm) below the surface**, and eight had appeared in that time one inch (2.5 cm) above the surface.*

I also found after a voyage of six weeks from England, on opening the case, that the roots had germinated a little. It will be invaluable in my opinion, here on Coffee estates, as a standard food for cattle. Grass is often difficult to obtain during some seasons of the year. To a dairy farmer it would be an acquisition. I confidently expect to get here, a crop every two months, if not more frequently.”

-‘Forage Plants and Their Economic Conservation by the New System of Ensilage: Part I: Caucasian Prickly Comfrey’ by Thomas Christy, Jun., F.L.S. (Fellow of the Linnean Society), Christy & Co., London, England, 1877, page 20.

*“**The Symphytum asperrimum (Prickly Comfrey)** has of late years again received considerable attention, and **wishing to test its value in New Zealand, I obtained roots of the different kinds from England, France, Australia and other places**, and having got them, subjected them to test culture. **They have grown and thriven well**, and I have no doubt that this climate and the conditions it will find here, will suit it very well. I believe it will be a very valuable plant for using as fodder for cows to increase their milk, for feeding bullocks, horses, and sheep.*

*There are several varieties have been sent me, some are more vigorous growers than others, they can be easily brought here in wardian, or such-like cases, with very few failures. **My last consignment was a case containing 1,000 small roots, they were 4 months before I could get them.** I had them put in the ground by common labourers, and yet over 800 of them are now growing, they have had no watering during warm weather, or other artificial care, as I wanted to try what they would do if planted out and left to themselves. The result has been that they stood the driest, hottest, coldest, and most windy weather, and grew through it all, so that, bearing this rough treatment without any digging, manuring, hoeing, or other cultivating, and yet growing vigorously.*

They must be regarded as able to stand unfavourable conditions well**, and if, with this treatment, they prove that they can keep a large number of live stock to the area upon which they grow, and make them improve in condition quickly, **they may then be regarded as a useful and good addition to our fodder plants, but as I never think much of any plant until it has had five or six years testing, it is too soon yet to say much in favour of this plant.”

-‘Further Observations Upon Certain Grasses and Fodder Plants’, Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand, Volume 11, August 1878. ‘Botany’ by S. M. Curl, M.D., pages 409-410.

(Wardian case was an early type of terrarium or sealed container for plants. It was used in the 1800s to protect plants imported to Europe from overseas. Without this protection most plants died from exposure during long sea journeys.)

*“**The three main maxims for successful Comfrey growing are: ‘Keep it Clean’; ‘Keep it Cut’; ‘Keep it Fed’.**”*

-Russian Comfrey: A Hundred Tons an Acre of Stock or Compost for Farm, Garden or Smallholding by Lawrence D. Hills. London England: Faber and Faber, Limited, 1953, page 67. (‘Clean’ means free of weeds, especially do not let grass grow near it.)

From ‘Catalogue of Messrs. Suttons’ of Reading, Berkshire, England in 1878: