

Indian Boldo - *Plectranthus barbatus*



Indian Boldo, Indian Coleus, Brazilian Boldo or False Boldo is also known by the latin synonym *Coleus barbatus* but sometimes incorrectly designated as *Coleus forskalaei*.

Boldo is a handsome, tropical perennial related to the typical coleus species not to be confused with *Peumus boldus*, which is also commonly known as boldo with similar medicinal uses endemic to the central region of Chile but looks completely different.

A large upright, aromatic plant it is grown for its decorative foliage in the US. Throughout the rest of the world it is likely grown because of its culinary and herbal uses as well as pharmaceutical qualities. While fairly easy to grow, Indian Boldo prefers full sun and well draining soil. Periodically it displays large purple flower spikes. It can be propagated by seeds but usually by cuttings. No pests or diseases have been noted in the Keys and iguanas ignore it. Besides its medicinal uses, Boldo is also used in food recipes as an aromatic particularly in South America, Africa and Asia. In India it is grown for its edible roots which are used to make a pickle.

Medicinally, Indian Boldo is an Ayurvedic herb renowned for containing forskolin, a compound that stimulates cAMP production to aid in weight management, cardiovascular health, and respiratory function. It is traditionally used to manage hypertension, asthma, digestive issues, and skin disorders, with research highlighting its ability to relax smooth muscles and increase fat metabolism.

Local Keys residents have reported that in Cuba it is considered a very healing herb for respiratory and cardiovascular conditions. Based upon a common use in parts of Africa, current "food forest" influencers on social media also refer to it as the toilet paper plant, which seems a bit demeaning considering its healing potentials. Leaves of *Plectranthus barbatus* are often chewed or drunk as an herbal tea to treat the wide range of diseases it is reportedly used for.

Current studies have demonstrated that the herbal tea has antioxidant properties and can act as a neuronal acetylcholinesterase (AChE) inhibitor, which is a mechanism used for addressing Alzheimer's disease and antioxidant activity primarily driven by rosmarinic acid with contributions from flavonoid derivatives. While the metabolism and bioavailability of the herbal tea components is different from the administration of pure compounds it has been demonstrated that rosmarinic acid present in herbal teas can be detected in the brain.

As a precaution, even though this herb has many potent health benefits that deserve your further personal research, pregnant women and those on blood thinning medications such as Warfarin (Coumadin) or those who have low blood pressure should avoid consuming it.

