Inula britannica var. japonica **Thunb.**

Asteraceae
Source of: xuán fù huā 旋覆花
Japanese elecampagne flower

Summary Description

A full sun, weedy, herbaceous perennial that can spread aggressively through rhizomes, depending on conditions. Hardy to Zone 5 at least, and may be more expansive in warmer zones. Branched stems to two feet in height bear bisexual disk and yellow ray flowers, the disk up to 2/3rds inch in diameter, and a pappus of bristles. Lower leaves wither before flowering, median leaves are a lance shape about 4 inches long. Xuán fù huā, "rotated upturned flower" is also known in traditional Chinese medicine as "the only flower that descends," referring to its action. Flowers July to October.

Propagation

Surface sow seed, keep at 65-70°F. Conditions may favor vegetative propagation.

Cultivation

Plant in average well-drained soil at a 6-12 inch radius. The plants will spread by the following season to form a mass. Moist, warm conditions seem to promote expansiveness, but the plant may be easily managed as the root system is shallow.

Harvest & Processing

Harvest fully open flowerheads including pappus on a dry sunny morning after the dew has dried. Dry at low heat (<110°F) in a single layer. The flowerheads will curl and dry to a spherical shape ½ inch in diameter or less. The overall color should be golden with white hairs and few stems.

References

Flora of China: http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=2&taxon_id=200024058
Bensky *Materia Medica* page: 432

Synonyms

I. britannica L. var. *chinensis* (Rupr. ex Maxim.), *I. japonica* var. *japonica*

Alternates

I. hupehensis, *I. helianthus-aquatica*. **Note**: Another elecampane, *Inula helenium* L. (alternate *I. racemosa* Hook. f.), is the source of the root herb tǔ mù xiāng which was the original mù xiāng until *Aucklandia (=Saussurea) lappa* Clarke was imported into China from India beginning in the 19th century. Listed on CITES Appendix II, Saussurea is now extensively cultivated in China and preferred for mù xiāng. *Inula helenium* can easily be grown in New York, but is probably not marketable at present.

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The OTHER Inula

Inula helenium L., source of elecampagne root (photos above right and below) can grow in New York but currently is not preferred by our market.