

CASCARA SAGRADA



Frangula purshiana

[FRANG-yoo-luh pur-shee-AH-nuh]

(syn *Rhamnus purshiana*)

Family: Rhamnaceae

Names: cascara buckthorn, sacred bark, chitem bark, bearwood, bearberry, coffeeberry bark, Mountain cranberry bark, bitter bark, Ecorce Sacree, yellow bark, cttim bark, Persian bark; Kushina, Joster (Russian); Amerikanische Faulbaumrinde (German); k!labuq!wacupt (Makah); tatsa' bats (Skagit); k'ladyats (Squaxin)

Description: Lax evergreen shrub or tree, hardy to 5F with a height of 10-40 feet, spread of 10-30 feet with obovate, irregularly toothed, deeply veined dull green leaves up to 6 inches long. Umbels of small flowers appear in late spring, followed by poisonous black berries, ½ inch in diameter.

Cultivation: Prefers well-drained soil in sun or partial shade. Propagate by seed sown in autumn or by semiripe cuttings in summer, or by layering in late winter or early spring. Shorten or thin out branches and remove dead wood in late winter or early spring. Bark is stripped from young plants in spring and early

summer, and dried for one to two years before use in decoctions, liquid extracts, powders, and tablets.

History: Rhamnus is Latin for buckthorns and *purshiana* after Fredrick Pursh, a German botanist. Cascara sagrada, a name given by Spanish-Mexicans, means sacred bark dating back to the seventeenth century, when it was bestowed on this tree by Spanish and Mexican explorers. Apparently, they were intrigued by the American Indians use of the bark for a wide variety of medicinal purposes. It was first listed in the US Pharmacopoeia in 1890. It is mild enough for use in treating children and the elderly. Indiscriminate stripping of bark, leading to the destruction of some 100,000 trees a year, was reported as early as 1909. Honey produced from cascara flowers also has a slight laxative effect.

Constituents: astringent compounds, tannin, bitter compounds (Anthraquinone glycosides); emodin glycosides, together with aloin-like glycosides, cascarosides, chrysaloin, chrysophanol, aloe-emodin, bitter principle, tannins, ferment and resin

Properties: A bitter, astringent, cooling herb that has a tonic effect on the liver and digestive system, and acts as a laxative; nervine; emetic.

Energetics: cold, bitter

Meridians/Organs affected: spleen, stomach, liver colon

Solvents: diluted alcohol and boiling water

Medicinal Uses: Cascara is a very effective laxative, containing hydroxymethyl anthraquinones that cause peristalsis of the large intestine, emodin and other rhamnoid

glycosides. It has been used as such by many First Nations groups. For example, Cascara bark tea was drunk as a laxative by Nuxalk, Coast Salish, Nuu-chah-hulth, and Kwakwaka'wakw, and a decoction of the inner bark and water was used as a remedy for dysentery. The bark is often aged before use so it will be less likely to cause nausea. First introduced to Europe in 1877, about 3 million pounds of the bark is harvested annually for use in commercial laxatives. Squaxin used a Cascara infusion to wash sores--sometimes people chewed the bark and then spit it on sores. The bark has also been used to treat heart strain, internal strains, and biliousness. Skagit people burn the bark and mix the charcoal with grease to rub on swellings, and also have employed the bark in a green dye for mountain goat wool. Makah eat the fresh berries in July and August. Internally used for chronic constipation, colitis, digestive complaints, hemorrhoids, liver problems, and jaundice. It is a medium-strength laxative and somewhat weaker than Rhubarb root and Senna leaf. Externally used to deter nail biting.

It is effective on the gall bladder ducts and helps the body rid itself of gallstones. Cascara Sagrada has also been helpful for the treatment of hemorrhoids by being non-irritating and forming a soft stool allowing painless passage. Cascara Sagrada helps in case where there is chronic hardening of the stool.

Remedies:

For constipation, dyspepsia, indigestion and hemorrhoids: 2 oz of the fluid extract in 8 oz of syrup of Yellow dock is a preparation for engorged liver and blood disorders with constipation.

1-2 tsp of the dried and aged bark infused in a cup of boiling water for 10 minutes, taken at bedtime. Standard dosage in formulas.

Homeopathy: Extract of bark is used in constipation and rheumatism

TCM: Used symptomatically in chronic conditions with intestines Qi stagnation, one is better served by treating it as a liver opening remedy with special focus on the constipation so often present. Effectively useful in excess internal heat conditions. Also, Cascara exhibits resolvent cleansing effects which are only partly due to its elimination activities. Overall metabolism is enhanced and chronic low level symptoms such as skin rashes, fetid stools and tendency to stone formation are improved. It is a good choice for treating symptoms due to stagnant conditions of excess and general toxemia, and specifically those involving the liver, stomach intestines.

Toxicity: Fruits taken in excess cause diarrhea and vomiting. Not given to pregnant or lactating women, or patients with intestinal obstructions

Ritual Uses: Legal Matters, Money, Protection. Sprinkle an infusion of cascara sagrada around your home before going to any court proceeding. It will help you win your case. It is also used in money spells and worn as an amulet against evils and hexes.

Other Uses: In the food and beverage industry, bitter cascara extract has been used in liqueurs. The debittered extract serves as a flavoring in soft drinks, ice cream and some baked goods. The fruits of the tree are eaten raw or cooked but are said to give a transient reddish cast to the skin in consumed in excess. Honey produced from the flowers of this plant is very dark, non-granulating and has a mild, laxative effect.

References:

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Plants

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