KAVA KAVA

**Piper methysticum**

[PIP-er]

**Family:** Piperaceae

**Names:** Yaqona (Fijian); kowa, awa, yaona, kowa kowa, wati, ava, ava pepper, intoxicating pepper

**Description:** Tender, erect shrub reaching a height of 9-21 feet and a spread of 6-15 feet with stout rhizomes, fleshy stems and ovate, tapering leaves up to 10 inches across. Small flowers are produced in spike 3 inches long. Native to Polynesian uplands.

**Cultivation:** Prefers well-drained, stony soil with ample water, in shade needing a minimum of 59-64F. Usually grown of frames. Propagate by semiripe cuttings in summer. Remove weak or congested stems in late winter or early spring before new growth begins. Roots are lifted as required, preferably when the roots approach 100 pounds, and used fresh, or dried for use in decoctions, liquid extracts, powders, and tablets.

**History:** Kava usage was first observed by Captain Cook and has 3,000 years of usage. It is used ritually throughout Polynesia as a means of bringing people together or honoring dignitaries. It’s recent acknowledgement to reduce stress and anxiety has gained so much recognition that harvesting pressure is leading to its endangerment in Hawaii.

**Constituents:** resin including lactones, kawahin, yangonin, methysticin, glycosides, starch, piperidine alkaloid (pipermethysticine)

**Properties:** analgesic, antispasmodic, antiseptic, sedative, diuretic, tonic

**Energetics:** pungent, bitter, warm

**Meridians/Organs affected:** liver, kidneys

**Medicinal Uses:** The kava lactones have a depressant effect on the central nervous system and are antispasmodic. Research sows that kawain, in particular, is sedative. The kava lactones also have an anesthetic effect on the lining of the urinary tubules and the bladder. The results of a clinical trial in Germany published in 1990 revealed that kawain is as effective as benzodiazepene in helping to relieve anxiety. Kava’s analgesic and cleansing diuretic effect often makes it beneficial for treating rheumatic and arthritic problems such as gout. The herb helps to bring relief from pain and to remove waste products from the affected joint. Kava is a safe and proven remedy for anxiety that does not cause drowsiness or affect the user’s ability to operate machinery. It may be taken long term to help relieve chronic stress, and its combination of anxiety-relieving and muscle-relaxant properties makes it of value for treating muscle
tension as well as emotional stress. With its tonic, strengthening, and mildly analgesic properties, kava kava is a good remedy for chronic pain, helping to reduce sensitivity and to relax muscles that are tensed in response to pain. It has an antiseptic action and in the past it was used specifically to treat venereal disease, especially gonorrhea. Although it is no longer generally applied in this way, it is a valuable urinary antiseptic, helping to counter urinary infections and to settle an irritable bladder. Absorption in the gastrointestinal tract is remarkably rapid, so the effects are felt almost immediately.

It is used as an intoxicating beverage in certain South Sea islands. It can induce lethargy, drowsiness and dreams. It is one of the best pain-relieving herbs.

**Dosage:** 4 Tbsp simmered 10 minutes in 1 pint of water; standard dosage in formulas, 3-9 gms.

To alleviate urinary infections, drink ½ cup twice a day. For stress, take 30 drops of the tincture with water 3 times a day

**Ritual Uses:**
- **Gender:** Feminine
- **Planet:** Saturn
- **Element:** Water
- **Deities:** Lono, Kane, Kanaloa
- **Powers:** Visions, Protection, Luck

Kava kava is used as a sacramental drink, first fermented into a potent beverage, and taken before important rituals. It then induces visions and altered states of perception. The root is also made into a potion and this also is used. Due to the physical action of the herbe upon the sexual organs, they are stimulated and yet the sensation is dulled, making kava kava one of the most effective of aphrodisiacs. It is most used in ritual today, when sex is being explored as a sacred tool of the gods. When celebrating the Great Rite, kava kava can be part of the ritual cup or might be macerated in the oils which are used as lubricants. It may be steeped in very hot water, the mixture then thoroughly filtered through paper (coffee filter). The resulting liquid may be used as a douche prior to the Great Rite.

Traditionally the root was made into a tea. With its water-soluble components released, it acted as a mild stimulant and tonic. If the material is first chewed, then spit into a bowl and mixed with coconut milk, more powerful resins resembling narcotics are released in emulsion. For maximum effect, mix 1 oz of kava kava with 10 oz of water (or coconut milk), 2 Tbsp of coconut or olive oil, and 1 Tbsp of lecithin. Blend until the liquid takes on a milky appearance. This amount serves 1-2 persons. Resins may be extracted with isopropyl alcohol in a heated bath. The solvent is removed by evaporation. Redissolve in just enough warmed rum, vodka, or honey. This is a more potent method because alcohol swiftly carries the resins into the body’s system.

**Toxicity:** Driving or operating heavy or dangerous equipment is not recommended while under the influence of Kava Kava, as drowsiness is likely to occur. Kava Kava use is contraindicated during pregnancy or nursing, and in cases of depression. Do not take for more than 3 months, or more than 1,000 mg per day without medical advice. Extended continuous intake can cause a temporary yellow discoloration of skin, hair and nails, in which case it must be discontinued. Discontinue use if dilation of pupils or disturbances of coordination between vision and movement occur.

**References:**

**Resources:**
- Companion Plants, [www.companionplants.com](http://www.companionplants.com)

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