UVA URSI

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi
[ark-toh-STAF-ih-los OO-va UR-see]

Family: Ericaceae

Pharmaceutical Name: Folia ursae

Names: bearberry; bear’s grape, upland cranberry, arbutus, hog cranberry, arberry, mountain cranberry, mountain box, kinnikinnik, creaping manzanita, coralillo; Bärentraube (German); Macznica Garbarska, Chroscina (Polish); coralillo (Mexican); Rasin d’ours, Busserole (French)

Description: low-lying evergreen shrub growing to 20 inches. Has long trailing stems, dark green leaves that are glossy on the upper side, a long, fibrous root, woody stems and branches, inch-long, leathery, evergreen, paddle shaped leaves and tiny white or pink bell-shaped flowers tinged with red and small glossy red berries. The plant rarely grows taller than a few inches and prefers a dry, rocky, or sandy habitat.

Cultivation: uva-ursi is native to Europe and is naturalized throughout the northern hemisphere up to the Arctic. It grows in damp conditions in undergrowth, heathland, and grassland. It is typically propagated from cuttings and takes an unusually long time to root. It does poorly in rich soil. Keep the patch well weeded until the plants have become established. It does not transplant well. Once established, uva ursi spreads to become a hearty, attractive ground cover, which can survive temperatures of -50F. The leaves are gathered in autumn before the first frost. Because of their leathery texture, they are difficult to air dry. Spread them in a single layer and dry them with heat or in an oven. While not particularly palatable, the berries have been harvested in autumn as fruit

Constituents: The leaves contain hydroquinones (mainly arbutin, up to 17% and methylarbutin); Iridoids (monotropein, and in the roots, unedoside); tannins (up to 15%), phenolic glycosides, ursolic, malic and gallic acids and flavonoids (quercitrin, isoquercitrin, myricacitrin). Arbutin and other hydroquinones have an antiseptic effect in the urinary tract.

Actions: diuretic, astringent, demulcent, bitter, anti-catarrhal, anti-lithic, anti-microbial, tonic

Energetics: bitter, astringent, cold

Meridians/Organs affected: heart, bladder, small intestine, liver

History: The name uva-ursi means “bear’s grape” in Latin (uva for grape and ursus for bear). Arctostaphylos is from the Greek, arktoś
meaning bear and _staphyle, a bunch of grapes_. Bears are fond of the fruit. The Roman physician used uva ursi’s astringent leaves to treat wounds and stop bleeding. The plant was first documented in _The Physicians of Myddfai_, a 13th century Welsh herbal. Marco Polo reported Chinese physicians using it as a diuretic to treat kidney and urinary problems. Its association with the kidney was strengthened by the medieval Doctrine of Signatures because the herb grew in rocky, gravelly places, and at the time kidney stones were called gravel. Native American people used it as a urinary remedy and also enjoyed smoking a blend of uva-ursi leaves and tobacco which was the smoking mixture, kinnikinnik. The 19th century Eclectics recommended the herb for diarrhea, dysentery, gonorrhea, bed-wetting and chronic infections of the kidneys and urinary passages.

Bearberry has connections with the ancient Celtic goddess the Morrigan, the Irish goddess of war.

**Medicinal Uses:** Uva-ursi is one of the best natural urinary antiseptics. It has been used extensively in herbal medicine to disinfect and astringe the urinary tract in cases of acute and chronic cystitis and urethritis. However, it is not a suitable remedy if there is a simultaneous infection of the kidneys. Experiments have shown that uva-ursi extracts have an antibacterial effect. This action is thought to be stronger in alkaline urine—thus the efficacy of uva-ursi is likely to increase if it is taken in combination with a vegetable-based diet. Sodium bicarbonate is often administered with uva ursi to help increase the alkalinity of the urine. In the urinary tract, the arbutin in uva ursi is chemically transformed into an antiseptic chemical, hydroquinone. Beta-carotene, present in generous quantities in uva ursi, is known to stimulate the production of epithelial cells. Ursolic acid has antiseptic properties and the flavonoids have spasmolytic properties on the smooth muscles which help reduce reactions to pain stimulus in urinary tract infections and increase renal volume in inflamed renal tubules. Uva Ursi’s allantoin may help spur wound healing. Allantoin is the active ingredient in several over-the-counter skin creams for relief of oral herpes and for irritation associated with vaginal infections. It’s the diuretic most often used in herbal weight-loss formulas as a diuretic. Uva Ursi is among the herbs useful in diabetes for excessive sugar. It is topically applied for swollen ankles and knees and gout. Used as a bath to relieve rheumatism or arthritis; as a sitz bath for vaginal inflammation and irritation after delivery.

**Solvents:** alcohol, water

**Combinations:**
Urinary infections: couchgrass and yarrow

**Dosage:** For the bath, boil ⅛ cup of the leaves in a gallon of water for 20 minutes and cool to body temperature. Take bath every morning for 3 or 4 days. For urinary tract usage, use a tincture (1/2 teaspoon in water as needed) or soak the leaves in an equal volume of brandy for several days and make a tea from the wet leaves, a teaspoon for a cup.

**REMEDIES:** For wounds, apply fresh, crushed leaves to minor cuts and scrapes after they have been thoroughly washed with soap and water. Or dip a clean cloth in a decoction and apply the compress to the affected area. To minimize the unpleasantly astringent taste soak the leaves in cold water overnight. For a decoction to help treat urinary symptoms or diarrhea, simmer 1 teaspoon per cup of boiling water for 10 minutes. Drink up to 3 cups a day. In a tincture, use ¼ to 1 teaspoon up to three times a day.

**Antiseptic Cure for the Lower Abdomen**
3 oz bearberry leaves
4 cups water
1 tsp sodium bicarbonate

Lightly chop the bearberry leaves and soak for 12 hours in a large bowl of cold water. Then boil the leaves in a saucepan for 3
minutes. Pour this mixture into the bowl and infuse until the liquid is drinkable. Add the sodium bicarbonate and shake. Drink 1 cup at a time, warm or cold, several times during the day. Repeat over 10 consecutive days. This bitter herbal tea has a powerful effect on small kidney stones, purulent cystitis, gout, hypotrophy of the prostate and bacterial venereal infections such as blennorrhagia.

HOMEOPATHY: Homeopaths recommend a microdose of uva ursi for incontinence, blood in the urine, and kidney and urinary tract infections.

Cautions: Do not take during pregnancy or if suffering from kidney disease. It is generally advisable to take uva-ursi for no more than 7-10 days at a time. Uva ursi often turns urine a dark green color but is not a cause to be alarmed.

Ritual Uses: Uva ursi facilitates access to deeper spiritual resource. It is smoked or burned as incense for astral or psychic work or to invoke prophecy. It is used to bring out the water element. Small daily amounts taken as a spiritual tonic are recommended. Some Native American tribes use uva ursi to train shamans in the development of their skills in divination and prophecy. Herb of Mars, Pluto and Scorpio. It can be carried as a talisman when there is excess fear.

Incense: mix 1/3 oz each of bearberry, juniper, myrrh and dragon’s blood in enough wine to make a thick paste. Spread out on tin foil to dry, leave for two weeks, turning often. Burn a pinch of the incense nightly.

Emotional Uses: Bearberry is associated with the base chakra. It encourages the development of the warrior within, and deals with victimhood. It helps to build a protective shield of armor, the ability to be self-protected and less fearful. Burn 1 teaspoonful of the leaves whenever you feel the need.

Toxicity: Prolonged use of the tea can irritate the stomach and throat membranes. It should not be taken more than 3 or 4 days in a row.

Cosmetic Use: Cold uva ursi tea makes a good splash for closing the pores after a facial steam. Being antiseptic, the herb is well situated for antibacterial liniments.

Herbal Bath Blend:
1 oz uva ursi leaves
1 oz comfrey
1 oz shepherd’s purse
1 whole bulb fresh garlic
½ cup sea salt
2 gallons water

Simmer herbs in 1 gallon water for 30 minutes. Strain, reserving fluids. Add remaining gallon water to herbs and simmer for 30 minutes. Strain, combining fluids. Add 2 gallons strained fluids to bath water. This bath is recommended to be taken shortly after childbirth for at least 30 minutes; the water should be about hip level and comfortably warm. Including the baby in the bath will start the healing process of the cord stump and it may drop off as early as 3 days.

Other Uses: Can be used as a natural dye with color varying from camel to gray or blue-green depending on plant parts, mordant and species used.

Culinary Uses: The red berry is smooth, somewhat mealy and bland tasting. Cooking destroys the tannins and improves the flavor. Can be a potentially important emergency food.

Recipes:
Bearberry Jelly
2 quarts of berries
1 cup of granulated sugar per cup of juice
1 Tbsp lemon juice
3 oz of liquid pectin

Select about 2 quarts of fully ripened berries, wash and stem. Place into a saucepan and cook until the fruit pops and the juice flows
freely. Remove from the heat and squeeze through a jelly bag. Measure the juice, place into a deep saucepan, add 1 cup of granulated sugar per cup of juice. Add 1 tablespoon of lemon juice, and mix thoroughly. Place the mixture over a high heat and boil until sugar dissolves. Stir constantly. Add 3 ounces of liquid pectin and keep the mixture at a hard boil for 1 full minute. Skim off the red colored foam, pour into hot, sterile jelly jars and seal. (Wild Preserves)

**Spicy Bearberry Paste**

Collect, wash and stem 2 quarts of fresh bearberries. Place into a deep saucepan, add a little water and cook until the berries pop and the juice flows. Remove and pour through a sieve or food mill, extracting the seeds. Place the juice pulp in a large bowl. Add 1 crushed stick of cinnamon, 1 tablespoon of whole cloves and 1 tsp of allspice. Mix into the juicy pulp, cover and allow to sit for 24 hours. Strain the mixture, removing the whole spice particles. Measure the juice pulp, place in a deep saucepan, add 1 cup of granulated sugar for each cup of pureé. Mix well and boil for 10 minutes, stirring constantly. Pour into hot sterile jars and seal. (Wild Preserves)

**References:**


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**Resources:**

Companion Plants, [www.companionplants.com](http://www.companionplants.com)  
Crimson Sage, [http://www.crimson-sage.com](http://www.crimson-sage.com)  
The Rosemary House, [www.therosemaryhouse.com](http://www.therosemaryhouse.com) tincture

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