**Hamamelis virginiana**  
[ham-uh-MEE-lis vir-jin-ee-AN-uh]

**Family:** Hamamelidaceae

**Names:** common witch hazel, hamamelis, long boughs, pistachio, snapping hazel, snapping hazelnut; southern witch hazel, spotted alder, striped alder, tobacco wood, white hazel, winterbloom, wood tobacco; Hamamélide (French); Virginischer Zauberstrauch (German); Amamelide, Trilopo (Italian); Guvercin ag (Turkish); Hamamelis, Abellano hamamelis, Vara mosqueada (Spanish)

**Description:** A small deciduous tree growing to 15 feet with coarsely toothed, broadly oval leaves. It drops its leaves each autumn. Its single root sends up several twisting stems that fork into many flexible, hairy branches. Witch hazel blooms long after most other flowers have disappeared, depending on location, from September to December, hence the name winterbloom. The shrub’s spidery yellow flowers appear at the same time its previous year’s fruits mature. Its woody seed pods burst open with an audible pop and propel their two hard black seeds up to 25 feet. The seeds are edible and have been compared to hazelnuts, hence the name snapping hazelnut. The bark is light brown to gray, with light circular spots.

**Cultivation:** Witch hazel is a woodland tree, indigenous to Canada and eastern parts of the US. It’s hardy to Zone 3. The trees are grown from hardwood cuttings or from seed, both of which are planted in autumn. The seeds should be refrigerated at around 40F for several months before planting to encourage germination. Cuttings generally produce roots in about 10 weeks. Witch hazel grows best in moist, rich, sandy or peaty soil under partial shade but tolerates poorer soil and full sun. Best soil pH is 5.5-6.5. The leaves are gathered in summer and dried. The bark is harvested during the autumn and dried as quickly as possible in the shade. The leaves and young twigs are distilled to make commercial witch hazel. The bark is used in tinctures and ointments.

**Constituents:** Leaves: tannins; 8-10%, composed mainly of gallo-tannins with some condensed catechins and proanthocyanins. The presence of hamameltannin is disputed. Miscellaneous: flavonoids: quercitin, kaempferol, astragalin, myricitrin and others; volatile oil, containing hexenol, n-hexen-2-al, ß-ionones, and others. Bark: tannins: 1-7%, mainly the ß- and y-hammamelitannins, with some condensed tannins such as d-galocatechin, l-epigallocatechin and l-epicatechin; saponins, volatile oil, resin

**Actions:** astringent, anti-inflammatory, stops external and internal bleeding

**Energetics:** bitter, astringent, neutral

**Meridians/Organs affected:** heart, stomach and intestines
History: The “hazel” in this herb’s name comes from its similarity to the common hazelnut. As for the “witch,” in medieval Middle English, “witch” was spelled “wyche” or “wych” and meant pliant of flexible. Indians used the branches to make bows. Witch hazel’s Latin name refers to Virginia, but the shrub grows all over the eastern U.S. Often used by dowsers in searching for water. It was first brought to Europe by Collinson in 1736 where it received the name “witch hazel”. The botanical name came from hama, meaning “same time” and mellon, or fruit, signifying any fruit-bearing tree.

Medicinal Uses: Witch hazel was highly valued in Native American medicine. Many tribes rubbed a decoction on cuts, bruises, insect bites, aching joints, sore muscles, and sore backs. They also drank witch hazel tea to stop internal bleeding, prevent miscarriage, and treat colds, fevers, sore throat and menstrual pain. The colonists adopted these uses until the 1840s when an Oneida medicine man introduced the plant to Theron T. Pond of Utica, NY. Pond learned of the plant’s astringent properties and ability to treat burns, boils, wounds and hemorrhoids. In 1848, he began marketing witch hazel extract as Pond’s Golden Treasure. Later, the name was changed to Pond’s Extract and witch hazel water has been with us ever since. The Eclectic text, King’s American Dispensatory, listed that the decoction was very useful the fluid extract had little to recommend it. It as listed in the US Pharmacopoeia from 1862 through 1916 and in the National Formulary from 1916-1955. It was finally dropped because the 24th edition of The Dispensatory of the United States stated witch hazel is “so nearly destitute of medicinal virtues, it scarcely deserves official recognition...[Its continued use serves only to fill] the need in American families for an embrocation [liniment] which appeals to the psychic influence of faith.” Contemporary herbalists recommend only the decoction of witch hazel bark. Though the commercial witch hazel water may not contain tannins, it does contain other chemicals with reported antiseptic, anesthetic, astringent, and anti-inflammatory action. Witch hazel water is an ingredient in Tucks, Preparation H Cleansing Pads and several German hemorrhoid preparations.

Witch hazel itself contains large quantities of tannins. These have a drying, astringent effect, causing the tightening up of proteins in the skin and across the surface of abrasions. This creates a protective covering that increases resistance to inflammation and promotes healing of broken skin. Witch hazel also appears to help damaged blood vessels beneath the skin. It is thought that this effect may be due to the flavonoids as well as to the tannins. When witch hazel is distilled it retains its astringency, suggesting that astringent agents other than tannins are present. Witch hazel is very useful for inflamed and tender skin conditions, such as eczema. It is mainly used where the skin has not been significantly broken and helps to protect the affected area and prevent infection. It is valuable for damaged facial veins, varicose veins and hemorrhoids, and is an effective remedy for bruises. Due to its astringent properties, it helps to tighten distended veins and restore their normal structure. A lotion can be applied to the skin for underlying problems such as cysts or tumors. Witch hazel also makes an effective eyewash for inflammation of the eyes. Less commonly, it is taken internally to alleviate diarrhea, helping to tighten up the mucous membranes of the intestines, and for bleeding of any kind. Japanese research showed witch hazel to have sufficient antioxidant activity to have potential against wrinkles.

Combinations: for easing of hemorrhoids combines well with pilewort.

Dosage:

Infusion: pour a cup of boiling water on 1 tsp of the dried leaves and let infuse for 10-16 minutes. Drink 3 times a day.

Ointment: Can be made into an excellent ointment

Tincture: Take 1-2ml 3 times a day.
REMEDIES: For varicose veins dilute 20 ml of the bark tincture in 100 ml cold water and sponge on. Dab the distilled witch hazel onto insect stings, sore skin, and broken veins. Apply an ointment of the bark to hemorrhoids twice a day. Use an infusion of the leaves in a lotion for broken veins and cysts.

Cosmetic Uses:
Sunburn lotion: 1 egg white, 1 tsp clear, runny honey, ½ tsp witch hazel. Mix all ingredients together and apply to sunburn.
Herbal Bubble Bath Gel: ¾ pint herbal infusion containing angelic, comfrey, sweet cicely and sweet woodruff; 10 Tbsp shredded castile soap, 3 Tbsp glycerin, 4 tsp witch hazel, 6 drops eucalyptus oil, 2 Tbsp powdered gelatin. Strain the herbal infusion into a pan, place on a low heat, and add the soap. Next, mix the glycerin, witch hazel, and eucalyptus oil together in a separate container. Once the soap in the mixture is thoroughly dissolved, combine the two liquids, remove from the heat, and whisk well. Beat in the gelatin, and when cool, pot up and label. When running a bath, scoop a little of the bath gel into a heavy container and position it directly underneath the hot water bath tap.
Non-Greasy Hand Lotion: 1 tsp witch hazel, ½ Tbsp glycerin, 3 Tbsp eau de cologne. Mix the witch hazel and glycerin and stir. Add the eau de cologne. Shake well, bottle and label.
Witch Hazel-Vodka Conditioning Facial Toner: ¼ cup vodka, ¼ cup witch hazel, ¼ cup chopped cucumber (not peeled); 1 Tbsp olive oil, 1 tsp canola oil, 1/8 tsp orange oil or extract. In a blender, mix all ingredients together on low speed for 30 seconds. Store in a small cosmetic bottle. Apply to dry skin with a cotton ball. Mixture will not be homogenous, so shake vigorously in bottle before every application.
Witch Hazel Complexion Lotion: Dissolve ½ oz of borax in a pint of water over a low flame. Let cool, then stir in a cupful of alcohol and a half-cupful of witch hazel. Pour into bottles and cork tightly. Keep under refrigeration.
Mask for Oily Skin: 1 Tbsp clay, 1 Tbsp witch hazel, 1 strawberry, mashed; 1 drop spike lavender essential oil. Mix ingredients together and apply, leaving mask on for 5-10 minutes. Rinse

References:

Resources:
Crimson Sage, http://www.crimson-sage.com

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