

Bayberry (*Myrica cerifera*)

MEDICINAL: Bayberry, taken in small doses, increases the vitality of your total body systems, improving circulation. It can also be used as a poultice over varicose veins to strengthen the blood vessels. A douche made of the tea is used for vaginal infections. Tea made of Bayberry is a good gargle for sore throat and tonsillitis.

MAGICKAL: The oil of Bayberry will bring prosperity and luck. The leaves are burned to enhance psychic powers and to produce visions. Worn in an amulet, it will provide protection from evil and negativity. The leaves are used as decorations during the Yule season, and placed in your window it will protect against lightning striking your house. Write a wish on a bay leaf and then burn it if you want the wish to come true.

Sprinkling the crushed leaves in your cupboards will keep out cockroaches and other insect pests.

Bayberry Root and Powder Profile

Also known as

Myrica cerifera, wild cinnamon, Candleberry, Myrica, *Myrica cerifera*, *Myrica pensylvanica*, Southern Bayberry, Southern Wax Myrtle, Tallow Shrub, Vegetable Tallow, Waxberry. Not to be confused with barberry.

Introduction

Bayberry trees grow near swamps and marshes, in sandy soil, or pine barrens. It is widely cultivated in the Eastern U.S. and the British Isles. American colonists initially used bayberry in candle making due to the wonderful fragrance the leaves have, but they were not yet aware of their medicinal properties as yet. Bayberry was however used medicinally by the Choctaw Tribe in the Southern Americas in a decoction of leaves for a treatment against fevers. Eventually settlers learned of the plants uses for treatment of dysentery. It was eventually popularized in the North during the 19th century by noted herbalist Samuel A. Thompson. He recommended it for "heat" within the body; and also for colds, flu and other infectious diseases in addition to dysentery and fevers. The leaves of this plant release an intense, pleasant fragrance when rubbed. This scent is a safe insect repellent for dogs.

Constituents

Alpha-pinene, ascorbic acid, beta-carotene, betulin, calcium, chromium, cobalt, fiber, gallic acid, magnesium, manganese, myricitrin, niacin, phenolic acid, tannins and tannic acid.

Parts Used

Dried root bark and sometimes just the root.

Typical Preparations

Powders, teas, tinctures, and poultices. The tea should be drunk hot. Poultices are usually made by combining bayberry and slippery elm. In some countries a strong bark decoction is used to kill insects, and in Sweden the tree is burned on fires as a smudge for insect repellent.

Summary

The bayberry tree is supposed to impart good luck and prosperity to the house it is planted next to. Many other rituals involving good luck have grown up around the bayberry tree. For instance, it is thought that if you burn a bayberry candle on New Years Eve you will have good luck the following year, or if you carry a piece of the bark or berries around in a small satchel, or a dry leaf in your wallet, it will attract money. The original use of bayberry was in treating "cankers," at one time understood to be accumulations of cold at various sites in the body. Tannins make bayberry bark astringent, sealing over sites of inflammation and infection in the mouth, gums, and throat, and stimulant, inducing productive coughs that release phlegm. An alcoholic tincture of the bark may reduce sensitivity of the prostate to testosterone and research is ongoing. A tea gargle is said to help a sore throat, as well as helping to stop bleeding gums.

Precautions

For occasional use only. Since bayberry can stimulate uterine contractions, avoid during pregnancy. If you are allergic to bayberry wax, use with caution.

Bayberry

Botanical: *Myrica cerifera* (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Myricaceae

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---**Synonyms**---Wax Myrtle. Myrica. Candle Berry. Arbre à suif. Myricae Cortex. Tallow Shrub. Wachsgagle.

---**Parts Used**---The dried bark of the root. The wax.

---**Habitat**---Eastern North America.

---Description---The only species of a useful family that is regarded as official, *Myrica cerifera* grows in thickets near swamps and marshes in the sand-belt near the Atlantic coast and on the shores of Lake Erie. Its height is from 3 to 8 feet, its leaves lanceolate, shining or resinous, dotted on both sides, its flowers unisexual without calyx or corolla, and its fruit small groups of globular berries, having numerous black grains crusted with greenish-white wax. These are persistent for two or three years. The leaves are very fragrant when rubbed.

The bark as found in commerce is in curved pieces from 1 to 7 inches long, covered with a thin, mottled layer, the cork beneath being smooth and red-brown. The fracture is reddish, granular, and slightly fibrous. The odour is aromatic, and the taste astringent, bitter, and very acrid. It should be separated from the fresh root by pounding, in late autumn, thoroughly dried, and when powdered, kept in darkened, well-closed vessels.

The wax was first introduced into medicinal use by Alexandre in 1722. It is removed from the berries by boiling them in water, on the top of which it floats. It melts at 47 to 49 C. (116.6 to 120.2 F.). It is harder and more brittle than beeswax. Candles made from it are aromatic, smokeless after snuffing, and very brittle. It makes a useful body for surgeon's soap plasters, and an aromatic and softening shaving lather. It has also been used for making sealing-wax. Four-fifths of this wax is soluble in hot alcohol, and boiling ether dissolves more than a quarter of its weight. Four pounds of berries yield about one pound of wax.

---Constituents---There has been found in the bark of stem and root volatile oil, starch, lignin, gum, albumen, extractive, tannic and gallic acids, acrid and astringent resins, a red colouring substance, and an acid resembling saponin.

The wax (Myrtle Wax) consists of glycerides of stearic, palmitic and myristic acids, and a small quantity of oleic acid.

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---Medicinal Action and Uses---Astringent and stimulant. In large doses emetic. It is useful in diarrhoea, jaundice, scrofula, etc. Externally, the powdered bark is used as a stimulant to indolent ulcers, though in poultices it should be combined with elm. The decoction is good as a gargle and injection in chronic inflammation of the throat, leucorrhoea, uterine haemorrhage, etc. It is an excellent wash for the gums.

The powder is strongly sternutatory and excites coughing. Water in which the wax has been 'tried,' when boiled to an extract, is regarded as a certain cure for dysentery, and the wax itself, being astringent and slightly narcotic, is valuable in severe dysentery and internal ulcerations.

---Dosages---Of powder, 20 to 30 grains. Of decoction, 1 to 2 fluid ounces. Of alcoholic extract, or Myricin, 5 grains.

---Other Species---MURICA GALE, SWEET GALE, ENGLISEI BOGMYRTLE, or DUTCH MYRTLE, the badge of the Campbells. The leaves of this species have been used in France as an emmenagogue and abortifacient, being formerly official under the name of Herba Myrti Rabantini, and containing a poisonous, volatile oil. The plant is bitter and astringent, and has been employed in the northern counties as a substitute for hops, and also mingled with bark for tanning, and dyeing wool yellow. The dried berries are put in broth and used as spices. Formerly it was much used in cottage practice, its properties being similar to those of *M. cerifera*. It is covered with a golden, aromatic dust, and is thus used to drive away insects. The leaves are infused like tea, especially in China, as a stomachic and cordial. See [GALE \(SWEET\)](#).

M. nagi. A glucoside, Myricitrin, resembling quercitrin, has been separated from the yellow colouring matter, or myricetin.

M. cordifolia, of the Cape of Good Hope, yields a wax which is said to be eaten by Hottentots.

M. Pensylvanica has roots with emetic properties.

A Brazilian species yields a waxy-resinous product called Tabocas combicurdo, which is used as a 'pick-me-up.'

BAYBERRY is a synonym for the Wild Cinnamon or *Pimenta acris* of the West Indies and South America, which yields Bay Rum and oil of Bayberry.