

Cedar Berry Profile

Also known as

Juniperus monosperma, One-seed Juniper, Cherrystone Juniper, Redberry Juniper, New Mexico Cedar, West Texas Juniper, and Sabina

Introduction

Juniperus monosperma, also known as one-seed juniper, has a long tradition in Native American medicine. This needle bearing tree is native to the Southwestern United States, and covers nearly 3/4 of the state of New Mexico. A very hardy species, the cedar berry tree can grow in poor soil when and where other trees cannot. The one-seed juniper can grow to heights of 25 feet, and has flat, scale-like leaves and bluish-green berries. There are in fact two different types of cedar berry trees, one male and one female. Each has flowers, but only the female produces a small waxy pod with a single seed; this is what we consider the "berry". While the trees grow slowly, the berries reach maturity in one year. Many parts of the tree are used in traditional medicine, including a paste made of crushed berries. Among the conditions that cedar berry has been used to treat are cough, fever, rheumatism, diabetes, tuberculosis, scurvy, toothache and to promote menstruation.

Constituents

Alcohols, cadinene, camphene, flavone, flavonoids, glycosides, podophyllotoxin (an anti-tumor agent), vitamin C, volatile oils, resin, sabinal, sugar, sulfur, tannins, and terpinene

Parts Used

Berries primarily, though sometimes you can use the twigs and leaves.

Typical Preparations

Berries may be crushed, added whole to food as a flavoring/preservative, steeped in boiling water to make a tea or infusion, or eaten fresh or dried. Sometimes found as a capsule.

Summary

Juniperus monosperma is a variety of juniper that grows in higher, dryer elevations in the southwest. It has traditionally been used in the same ways as the common juniper. Besides the medicinal uses listed above, juniper boughs and leaves were often burned to help purify the air, and the leaves and twigs can be used to make a green or brown dye. While there has been little formal research done to substantiate the medical claims, a number of botanical databases note that the various chemical constituents of the leaves and cedar berries do have emetic, diuretic, antibiotic, germicidal and antiseptic properties. Dr. James Duke notes that the plant has chemicals that suggest it may help the body fight arthritis, asthma, cough, congestion, hepatitis and muscle stiffness.

Precautions

Cedar berry can be toxic when taken in large amounts. It should not be used by people with kidney or urinary tract problems, or by pregnant or nursing mothers, as it causes contractions.