

Devil's Club Root Bark Profile

Also known as

Alaskan Ginseng, Wild Armored Alaskan Ginseng, Pacific Ginseng, Devil's Walking Stick, *Oplopanax horridum*, *Oplopanax horridus*, *Echinopanax horridum*, *Fatsia horrida*, *Acanthopanax horridum* (Note: Devil's club is not a ginseng, and in the U.S. it is now illegal to market it with those names.)

Introduction

Devil's club, a close cousin to Ginseng, is a large shrub native to the cool moist forests of western North America. However, scattered colonies of Devil's club exist on the western shores and islands of Lake Superior. It is noted for its large palmate leaves and erect, woody stems covered in brittle spines. People often describe the plant as having a "primordial" appearance upon first inspection. Devil's club is acutely sensitive to human disturbance and reproduces intolerably slowly with individual plants taking several years to reach reproductive maturity. Devil's club prime habitat is the rapidly disappearing old growth conifer forests of the Pacific Northwest.

Constituents

Nerolidol, torreyol, dodinene, bulnesol, dodecenol, cadenene, cedrol, araliasides and panaxosides of various and unspecific nature.

Parts Used

Bark of stem roots and bark of true roots as well as heartwood of true roots

Typical Preparations

As a tea, the poultice of leaves and stems, and in capsules and liquid extracts.

Summary

Devil's club main use is as a safe and effective expectorant and respiratory stimulant. It works by increasing bronchial secretions as well as helping to soften hardened bronchial mucus so it can be coughed out with greater ease. In addition, Devil's club has proven helpful for people suffering from Rheumatoid arthritis and other autoimmune disorders, especially while they are in remission and with accompanying modifications to the diet. Its usefulness in this context seems to lie in its ability to recalibrate the outside extremes of tolerable metabolic stress. Native American peoples, particularly the Tlingit, Skagit and Kwaikiutil successfully used Devil's club to treat adult-onset, insulin-resistant diabetes. In this same regard, Devil's club is useful for reducing tendencies towards sugar binging, which may help people seeking to lose weight. It has been reported that taking Devil's club will help a person to become more "attuned" to their own changing blood sugar levels. Recent studies have also indicated that Devil's club possesses antibacterial and antimicrobial constituents which may be beneficial in

treating tuberculosis and other dangerous infections. While Devil's club is a relatively lesser-known herb at this point, these discoveries suggest that there will likely be an increasing demand for it in the near future and this has raised concerns about its unregulated wild harvesting. Given that it has a limited native range and is slow to grow and reproduce, there are legitimate concerns that over-harvesting could damage or upset the delicate ecological balance of the Pacific Northwest.

Precautions

The berries of devil's club are poisonous, and the stems and leaves should not be eaten after the thorns on the plant have hardened. Those diagnosed with diabetes should see their medical practitioners regularly while using devil's club, as it may change the way that insulin works in the body.