

Hibiscus Flower Profile

Also known as

Hibiscus sabdariffa, red sorrel, African Mallow, Indian Sorrel, Jamaica Sorrel, Jamaica Tea Flower, and Roselle

Introduction

There are over 220 varieties of the Genus Hibiscus. It grows in most in tropical areas around the world, but certain hardy perennials can live anywhere, being able to weather freezing conditions and arising next year in bloom. Those found in the tropics cannot stand more than a few days of freezing weather and will die if such conditions persist. The flowers are of a magnificent variety of colors, some indicating their unique country of origin. There are many folk remedies attributed to hibiscus flowers, including help with stomach or digestive problems, and to help soothe the nerves. They are also the main ingredient in wonderfully refreshing teas made around the world, especially in Mexico, Latin America, and North Africa. Known as Agua de Jamaica, or simply Jamaica in Mexico, this tea is usually served chilled with copious amounts of sugar to sweeten the natural tartness of the hibiscus. Recently it has been added to many ready made teas due to its high levels of anti-oxidants, and has even become the main ingredient in certain sodas. The Journal of Human Hypertension published an article that showed that drinking hibiscus tea can reduce the blood pressure in people with type 2 diabetes.

Constituents

The tart taste of hibiscus is due to its content of 15 to 30% plant acids, including citric, malic, and tartaric acids. The wine-red color of the tea is due to anthocyanins, including delphinidins and cyanidins. In tea, the herb yields mucilage and pectins.

Parts Used

The flower, dried, cut, and powdered.

Typical Preparations

Hibiscus is available as a bulk tea and in tea bags, as well as an ingredient in tea mixtures. Can be used as a natural dye, and is incorporated in several cosmetics. Rarely found in capsule or extract form.

Summary

African folk medicine uses hibiscus as a diuretic, to relieve pressure in the gallbladder, and to relax the uterus. The mucilages in the herb make it a mild laxative, but they are also helpful when the herb is used as a wash to treat weeping eczema. Regular consumption of hibiscus teas often lowers blood pressure, typically 8 to 12 mm/Hg. Hibiscus is also the source of the hydroxycitric acid (HCA, or hydroxycut) used in many diet formulas. This compound has been long used to fight obesity. Scientific

studies with lab animals find that it stops the conversion of carbs in food to body fat. It fights appetite and encourages weight loss not by increasing energy expenditure but by encouraging the "wasting" of carbohydrates. HCA does not enhance weight loss during low-carb or Atkins-style diets, but it does help weight loss when used with a program of general calorie restriction reducing consumption of carbs, protein, and fats equally. Hibiscus powder will have more of a laxative effect than other forms of the herb. It delivers more HCA. It is also more likely to help lower LDL cholesterol, although definitive research of the use of this herb for controlling high cholesterol has not been completed.

Precautions

Avoid if there are gallstones. Do not store hibiscus powder for more than six months after purchase. Keep in a cool, dry place.