

Wild Indigo Root Profile

Also known as

Baptisia tinctoria, horsefly weed, indigo weed, rattle bush, yellow broom, clover broom

Introduction

A perennial member of the pea (Fabaceae) family, wild indigo favors dry, poor soil in open areas, and is common throughout the northeastern United States as far south as Florida and west as Minnesota. A North American native, both its common name and its botanical name (which combines the Latin and Greek words for "dye") indicate that it should be a rich source of dark blue pigment, but unfortunately the dye it yields (which is contained in the cream-colored to bright yellow flowers and seed pods, and is difficult to extract) is considered inferior to that of the true indigo plant (genus *Indigofera*). Instead, wild indigo root has a long history of medicinal use, dating back to the Mohegans of southern New England, who used the roots to make a wash for severe cuts and wounds. In the United States Pharmacopeia from 1916 to 1936 and the National Formulary from 1916 to 1936, wild indigo was given official status as an emetic, stimulant, antiseptic and astringent, and was recommended for the treatment of scarlet fever, diphtheria, typhoid fever, and dysentery. According to the German Commission E Monographs, in present-day Germany wild indigo root has been combined with *Echinacea purpurea* root and white cedar tips (*Thuja occidentalis*) to create a phytomedicine called Esberitox for the purpose of stimulating the immune system and enhancing the body's resistance to colds and flu.

Constituents

Isoflavones (which are estrogenic), flavonoids, alkaloids, coumarins, and polysaccharides.

Parts Used

The roots, medicinally. An inferior blue dye can be extracted from the flowers and seed pods through a complicated process involving chemicals and fermentation.

Typical Preparations

Most often used as a decoction (a half teaspoon in a cup of water up to three times daily), or a tincture (1-2 ml three times daily). The decoction can also be used externally as a wash for cuts and wounds, or combined with non-alcoholic witch hazel and calendula for nursing mothers, as a treatment for cracked nipples.

Summary

Wild indigo root is an antibacterial, antiseptic, astringent, cholagogue, emetic, purgative, and immune system stimulant. It is often recommended by medicinal herbalists, in combination with other herbs, to treat ear, nose and throat infections, and by itself as an antiseptic for external wounds and injuries.

Precautions

Large doses of wild indigo root can be toxic, causing vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, asphyxiation, and death. Wild indigo root should be avoided by pregnant women and people with autoimmune disorders, and should be used only under the guidance of a qualified health care practitioner.

Botanical: Baptisia tinctoria (R. BR.)

Family: N.O. Leguminosae

---**Synonyms**---Baptisia. Horse-fly Weed. Rattlebush. Indigo-weed. Sophora tinctoria (Linn.). Podalyria tinctoria (Michx.)

---**Parts Used**---Root, bark, leaves.

---**Habitat**---Dry hily woods from Canada to Carolia.

---**Description**---An herbaceous perennial which takes its name from the Greek *Bapto* (to dye); has a black woody root, yellowish internally with many rootlets; stem about 3 feet high smooth, glabrous, round, and branched; leaves, small, subsessile, alternate and palmately trifoliolate; leaflets rounded at end; calyx four-cleft; flowers, yellow, blooming August and September, in small loose terminal racemes. Legume short, bluish-black seeds, subreniform.

---**Constituents**---The root is non-odorous and of a nauseous acrid taste, containing gum, albumen, starch, a yellowish resin and a crystalline substance.

---**Medicinal Action and Uses**---Used internally in form of decoction or syrup in scarlatina, typhus, and in all cases where there is a tendency to putrescency; it is purgative, emetic, stimulant, astringent, and antiseptic, principally used for its antiseptic qualities.

---**Dosage**---Of the decoction, 1 tablespoonful. Fluid extract, 1/4 to 1/2 drachm. Baptisin, 1 to 3 grains.