

Jamaican Dogwood Bark and Powder Profile

Also known as

Piscidia piscipula, Fish Poison Tree, North American Dogwood, and Dogwood.

Introduction

Dogwood is a tropical shrub in the legume family with its native roots in the West Indies, Mexico, South Texas, Central America, and parts of South America and parts of the Pacific Northwest. The Mayans were known to use it for asthma and to reduce fevers. Western science, as well as the Eclectic physicians, used it for its pain relieving properties as early as the 1840s, where it was also prescribed for nervous conditions. It gained its nickname "fish poison tree" from the West Indian practice of filling an open container with its branches and then dumping the container into a lagoon. As the water became infused with isoflavones from the tree, passing fish "fall asleep" in the box and can be easily caught.

Constituents

Isoflavones, organic acids, beta-sitosterol, tannins.

Parts Used

Bark

Typical Preparations

Tea, tincture and sometimes encapsulated.

Summary

Jamaican Dogwood is considered a relatively powerful remedy for migraine and neuralgia. The herb is also used to treat ovarian and uterine pain. The main use of the herb, however, is to treat insomnia caused by nervous tension or pain. It is also known to contain a substance known as rotenone, which has been used in insecticide to control lice and fleas. It is believed to be relatively harmless to warm-blooded mammals.

Precautions

Jamaican Dogwood is a powerful sedative. It is not poisonous to humans, but taking more than the recommended dose can cause a marked sedative effect. Not recommended while pregnant.

Botanical: Piscidia erythrina (JACQ.)

Family: N.O. Leguminosae

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---Part Used---Bark.

---Habitat---West Indies, Florida, Texas, Mexico, the northern part of South America.

---Description---A tree with very valuable wood and with the foliage and habit of Lonchocarpus. The pods bear four projecting longitudinal wings. The pounded leaves and young branches are used to poison fish the method followed is to fill an open crate with the branches, drop it into the water, and swill it about till the water is impregnated with the liquid from the leaves, etc.; this quickly stupefies the fish and enables the fishers to catch them quickly. In commerce the bark is found in quilled pieces 1 or 2 inches long and 1 inch thick. The outer surface yellow or greyish brown, inner surface lighter coloured or white, and if damp a peculiar blue colour. Inside it is very fibrous and dark brown, taste very acrid and bitter, and produces burning sensation in mouth with a strong disagreeable smell like broken opium. In 1844 attention was called to its narcotic, analgesic and sudorific properties which are uncertain.

---Constituents---Resin, fat, a crystallizable substance called piscidin and in the aqueous extract of the bark piscidic acid, and a bitter glucoside.

---Medicinal Action and Uses---In some subjects it cures violent toothache, neuralgia and whooping-cough and promotes sleep, and acts as an antispasmodic in asthma. It also dilates the pupil and is useful in dysmenorrhoea and nervous debility. In other subjects it only causes gastric distress and nausea; over doses produce toxic effects.

---Preparations and Dosages---Fluid extract, 5 to 20 drops, which may be cautiously increased to 2 fluid drachms. Solid extract, 1 to 5 grains.