

Kava (*Piper methysticum*)

Common Names: kava pepper, kawa-kawa, kava-kava.

Location: This herb is native to the region of Polynesia.

Description: The root of the kava is used medicinally.

Properties: This herb is known for its use as a sedative. It can be used to treat urinary infections and prostate inflammations.

Uses: Use kava to treat depression, insomnia, restless leg syndrome, diminished sex drive, anxiety, and toothache.

Doses: This herb can be found in tablet form and should contain a dosage of 70 percent kavalactones.

Warnings: Do not take this herb if you are nursing or pregnant, or if you have Parkinson's disease, depression or anxiety disorders. Limit the amount of kava you consume because side effects such as labored breathing and dried skin can occur.

Kava is more of a social and ceremonial preparation than it is medicinal. Its primary action is as a relaxant, and at high levels an intoxicant and divinitory preparation. In normal use, the kava drinker becomes relaxed and sociable, and may later drift off into reverie. Large doses, as used by village chieftains and seers, induces a trance-like state with vivid dreaming. It is still used in some areas as a medicinal liniment, being prepared there as a tincture. Modern use of kava has included a preparation given to electroshock therapy patients as a muscle relaxant.

Use of kava requires bringing the insoluble resins into emulsion.

Traditional preparation is done by chewing the stems and spitting them with copious saliva into a bowl, to which water and coconut juice is added. The mixture is then kneaded and strained through fiber and drunk immediately.

A more palatable preparation is to wrap about an ounce in a single layer of plain cotton cloth or a few layers of cheese cloth, and tied off to form a ball. This is dunked in a quart or so of water, lifted and squeezed out, repeating this until the bubbles forming from the dripping water tend to remain on the surface of the water -- about 10 to 15 minutes. As with the traditional preparation, this tastes strongly musty and not particularly pleasant. It is drunk immediately in gulps. A tablespoon of sugar helps, and my favorite additive is a tablespoon of Ovaltine or other malted mixture. Most non-traditional preparations such as herb teas and other mixtures are either too low a dosage or improperly prepared and so are ineffective, most probably due to the bad taste of effective dosages.

A tincture is made by soaking the chopped root material in 3 times its volume of alcoholic liquor such as brandy or gin. This is shaken daily over 2 or 3 weeks and then strained. Internal use is 1 to 2 ounces, and external use is an ounce rubbed into sore muscles or soaked into a cloth which is laid over the affected area.

Kava Kava (*Piper methysticum*) is a traditional Polynesian herb from the root of the kava tree (*called waka*). Herbalists use it for its mild tranquilizing effect to relax the mind and bring clarity to thoughts while soothing the temperament and inducing a mild euphoria. It is considered a natural aphrodisiac that has the effect of directly increasing sexual desire and prowess and even increasing the intensity of the sensations felt during orgasm. **Kava** is an approved phytomedicine in Europe used to treat anxiety and can be used in aphrodisiac formulas as a nervine to produce an effect similar to a mild herbal ecstasy.

Kava is an ancient western Pacific crop related to the black pepper – both having heart-shaped leaves and flowers similar to the flower spike of the anthurium. Kava also has a peppery taste, and has long been part of religious, political and cultural life throughout the Pacific region. The drink was the beverage of choice for the South Pacific royal families. It is believed to have originated in Melanesia, and grows abundantly in the sunny Polynesian islands. Drank for hundreds of years by native islanders, it was only during Captain Cook's voyage to the Pacific in 1768-1771 that the white man first encountered the plant and its consumption in sacred ceremonies. According to his account, natives would chew or pound the root and mix it with water to produce a brownish, often bitter brew which they then consumed for its psychoactive properties.

In the Western world, kava is used as an herbal remedy to ease symptoms of anxiety, stress and depression. The effects of drinking kava include slight tongue and lip numbing due to the contraction of blood vessels in these areas, mild talkative and euphoric behavior, calming, a sense of well-being, clear thinking and relaxed muscles. Sleep is restful and there are no after-effects the next day.

Kava has also interestingly been employed by the military in Fiji to aid in vigilance and anxiety reduction, to provide concentration and focus, to provide muscle control before sports and music performances, to reduce anxiety associated with public speaking and other public performances, and in corporate meetings to aid in mental clarity, sociability and improved decision making.

Contrary to coffee, alcohol, and many pharmaceuticals, Kava is known to be non-addictive, and to have no tolerance buildup. Medical literature sometimes claims it has a "potential for addiction" because "it produces mild euphoria and relaxation". In a traditional setting, a moderately potent kava drink causes effects within 20–30 minutes that last for about two and a half hours, but can be felt for up to eight hours. Because of this, it is recommended to space out servings about fifteen minutes apart. Some report longer term effects up to two days after ingestion, including a feeling of mental clarity, patience, and an ease of acceptance. The effects of kava are most often compared to alcohol, or a large dose of diazepam.

The sensations, in order of appearance, are slight tongue and lip numbing (the lips and skin surrounding may appear unusually pale); mildly talkative and sociable behavior; clear thinking; calmness; relaxed muscles; and a sense of well-being. As with other drugs that affect the GABA receptors, there can also be paradoxical dysphoria. The numbing of the mouth is caused by the two kavalactones kavain and dihydrokavain which cause the contraction of the blood vessels in these areas acting as a local topical anesthetic. These anesthetics can also make one's stomach feel numb. Sometimes this feeling has been mistaken for nausea. Some report that caffeine, consumed moderately in conjunction with kava can significantly increase mental alertness.

The effects of a kava drink vary widely with the particular selection of kava plant(s) and amount. A

potent drink results in a faster onset with a lack of stimulation; the user's eyes become sensitive to light; they soon become somnolent and then have deep, dreamless sleep within 30 minutes. Sleep is often restful and there are pronounced periods of sleepiness correlating to the amount and potency of kava consumed. Unlike with alcohol-induced sleep, after waking the drinker does not experience any mental or physical after effects. However, this sleep has been reported as extremely restful and the user often wakes up more stimulated than he or she normally would (though excessive consumption of exceptionally potent brew has been known to cause pronounced sleepiness into the next day). Although heavy doses can cause deep dreamless sleep, it is reported that many people experience lighter sleep and rather vivid dreams after drinking moderate amounts of kava.

For a good reason, Kava Kava is known as the “anti-shyness” herb. One of the many amazing benefits of kava, is that it can be so relaxing without drowsiness, putting one in a more open and comfortable state, quite conducive to both initiating conversation with a potential partner or with a long time lover. It also can increase a sense of euphoria, without losing any of your wits or your faculties as alcohol so often can.

Kava can have a direct stimulating effect on the sexual organs if consumed in somewhat larger quantities. Some users attest that they experience a tingling feeling in the genitalia, when taking Kava.

Also known as

Piper methysticum and Awa

Introduction

Kava Kava is a traditional herb of the Pacific Islands that has a fascinating and somewhat mysterious history going back over 3000 years. There are many folk tales about the origin of kava kava, but most rely on a central theme that involves the first plant growing on the grave of someone who had been sacrificed. Drinking the traditional kava drink is thought to symbolically turn the drinker into a sacrificial victim. Kava Kava has traditionally been used and continues to flourish as a ceremonial beverage. We recall stories of Polynesian islanders sitting around in "Kava Rooms" literally becoming drunk and intoxicated with so much Kava that they fell into a stupor. Due to the lack of written records in the Pacific Islands, historians have postulated that this ceremony may have originated somewhere on the Asian sub-continent, perhaps even with the Chinese tea ceremony. New research points to Melanesia as the point of origin, maybe New Guinea or the Solomon Islands. It was first encountered by Europeans in the 18th century during the voyage of Captain Cook, who first recorded the process and ceremony in detail. According to Cook's account, the root was chewed and then pounded into mulch, which was then mixed with water to produce a brownish bitter beverage that was consumed for its psychoactive properties. Kava Kava is still used quite frequently today in the Pacific Islands during social gatherings, as well as recreationally.

Constituents

Kava lactones, kawahin, yanoginin, methysticin, glycosides

Parts Used

Whole roots, with the smaller rootlets that tendril from the main shaft being higher in active compounds. Powdered root is its main form for consumption to date. The typical cultivars which constitute the Kava Kava offered by Mountain Rose Herbs are Borugu, Plarasul, and Melo Melo.

Typical Preparations

Pulverized or powdered root to make a milky drink, liquid herbal extract, capsule, or cut root added to decoction tea.

Summary

Tom Harrison, in his book "Savage Civilization" (1937) said that "You cannot hate with kava in you", and whether that is true or not, Pacific Islanders have for centuries used Kava to calm nerves, and help with relaxation. It can be highly sedative and has been known to numb certain body parts of the body. Typically safe in controlled amounts and it makes a fine evening drink with no documented or substantiated side effects. It is considered safe by the German E Commission.

Precautions

Not to be used while pregnant or nursing. Not recommended to be used by those under the age of 18 or those with a pre-existing liver condition. Excessive consumption may impair ability to drive or operate heavy machinery.

Kava Kava

Botanical: *Piper methysticum* (FORST.)

Family: N.O. Piperaceae

- [Description](#)
- [Constituents](#)
- [Medicinal Action and Uses](#)
- [Dosages](#)

---**Synonyms**---Ava. Intoxicating Pepper. Ava Pepper.

---**Part Used**---The peeled, dried and divided rhizome.

---**Habitat**---Polynesia, Sandwich Islands, South Sea Islands. Official in the Australian Colonies.

---**Description**---An indigenous shrub several feet high, leaves cordate, acuminate, with very short axillary spikes of flowers, stem dichotomous, spotted. The natives prepare a fermented liquor from the

upper portion of the rhizome and base of the stems; it is narcotic and stimulant and is drunk before important religious rites. The root of the plant chewed and mixed with the saliva, gives a hot intoxicating juice; it is mixed with pure water or the water of the coco-nut. Its continued use in large doses causes inflammation of the body and eyes, resulting in leprous ulcers; the skin becomes parched and peels off in scales. Commercial Kava rhizome is in whitish or grey-brown roughly wedge-shaped fragments from which the periderm is cut off about 2 inches thick; the transverse section usually shows a dense central pith, surrounded by a clean ring of vascular bundles, narrow and radiating, separated by broadish light-coloured medullary rays. Fracture starchy, faint pleasant odour, taste bitter, pungent, aromatic; it yields not more than 8 per cent of ash.

---Constituents---Oil cells often contain a greenish-yellow resin, termed kawine; it is strongly aromatic and acrid; the plant contains a second resin less active than the first, a volatile oil and an alkaloid, Kavaine Methysticum yangonin, and abundance of starch.

---Medicinal Action and Uses---The effect on the nerve centres is at first stimulating, then depressing, ending with paralysis of the respiratory centre. The irritant action and insolubility of the resin has lessened its use as a local anesthetic, but for over 125 years Kava root has been found valuable in the treatment of gonorrhoea both acute and chronic, vaginitis, leucorrhoea, nocturnal incontinence and other ailments of the genitourinary tract. It resembles pepper in local action. A 20 per cent oil of Kava resin in oil of Sandalwood, called gonosan, is used internally for gonorrhoea. Being a local anaesthetic it relieves pain and has an aphrodisiac effect; it has also an antiseptic effect on the urine. The capsules contain 0.3 gram; two to four can be given several times per day. As Kava is a strong diuretic it is useful for gout, rheumatism, bronchial and other ailments, resulting from heart trouble.

---Dosages---Fluid extract, 1/2 to 1 drachm. Powdered root, 1 drachm. Solid extract, 1 to 15 grains.