

Orris Root

Also known as

Iris germanica, *Iris pallida*. (*Iris florentina* is a variety of *Iris germanica*.) Purple Flag, Bearded Iris, Fleur-de-lis, and Garden Iris.

Introduction

The iris is a group of plants known for their beautiful blooms and their adaptability to an astonishing variety of growing conditions, from the temperate reaches of Oregon to the marshes of Louisiana and even the desert American Southwest. In ancient times the iris was a symbol of power and majesty used as the original scepter. The orris is a group of two species of European iris, cultivated in the region near Florence and sold as "ghiaggiuolo." The rhizomes, resembling ginger, are dug up in August, stripped of their rootlets and bark, and then dried until they have a chalky appearance. Dried orris root smells like violets. It is used primarily as a base for natural toothpastes, and as a fixative in perfumes to enhance other aromas. Powdered orris root lends a pleasant scent to freshly laundered linens and to potpourri. It also can be used as a snuff to relieve sinus headache and as a stabilizer in cosmetics. Orris root is extremely "puckery" if chewed fresh. It must be dried to be palatable. Drying also concentrates its aromatic essential oils.

Constituents

Starch, myristic acid, iridin, nine recently identified anti-inflammatory flavonoids and four isoflavone glycosides: iriskashmirianin 4'-O-beta-D-glucoside (1), nigricin 4'-O-beta-D-glucoside (2), irilone 4'-O-beta-D-glucoside (3) and iridin (4).

Parts Used

The cleaned and dried root, powdered before storage.

Typical Preparations

Usually taken as powder, infusion, or tincture, can be encapsulated. Relatively large daily doses, 12-15 grams (3-5 tablespoons) are typically required.

Summary

The flavonoids of orris root are known to possess anti-inflammatory activity explaining the herb's traditional use as a remedy for sore throats and colds. Orris root is mildly diuretic; it was traditionally used to treat "dropsy" or congestive heart failure. Orris root that is stored in powdered form is more useful as a diuretic, while orris root that is stored in a chopped form is more useful as an anti-inflammatory.

Precautions

If it will be used internally, it is recommended under the care of someone experienced in this herb.