

Pipsissewa Herb Profile

Also known as

Chimaphila umbellata, Bitter Wintergreen, Ground Ivy, Prince's Pine, Rheumatism Weed, Striped Prince's Pine, Dragon's Tongue, and Spotted Wintergreen.

Introduction

A small, perennial evergreen native to much of southern Canada and the northern United States, pipsissewa was used by native peoples to treat urinary tract infections, as well as to reduce sweating and treat fever. Its scientific name literally means "winter loving," but its leaves are collected in late summer for medicinal use. The leaves have very little scent until they are rubbed to release a pleasant but mildly "puckery" scent. The whole plant has been used as an antibacterial, astringent, diuretic, stimulant and tonic. It is currently used as a flavoring in root beer production, and in candy.

Constituents

Arbutin, chimaphilin, resins, oil.

Parts Used

Dried leaf usually, although all parts of the plant including stems are medicinally active.

Typical Preparations

Teas (made in boiling water), and tinctures usually and very rarely found as a capsule. Cosmetically it can be found in lotions or creams from a fresh extract.

Summary

The primary uses of pipsissewa are for treating infections of the skin (with lotions) or urinary tract. As a diuretic, pipsissewa helps "flush out" infectious microorganisms. As an astringent, pipsissewa helps the skin heal over and prevents infection. Can be used as a substitute for uva-ursi, especially for persons who are unable to eat a vegetarian diet to alkalize the urine.

Precautions

None known. Some people seem to react to the oil produced by crushing the leaves and may break out as a result.

Botanical: Chimaphila umbellata (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Ericaceae

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---**Synonyms**---Pyrola umbellata. Winter Green. Butter Winter. Prince's Pine. King's Cure. Ground Holly. Love in Winter. Rheumatism Weed.

---**Parts Used**---Dried leaves only are official, though the whole plant, including root, is used.

---**Habitat**---Europe, Asia, Siberia, America, and found in all parts of the United States.

---**Description**---The name Chimaphila is derived from two Greek words meaning 'winter' and 'to love.' There are two varieties of this plant, *Chimaphila umbellata* and *C. maculata*. The former alone is the official plant, a small evergreen perennial with a creeping yellow rhizome, which has several creeping, erect or semi-procumbent stems, angular, marked with the scars of former leaves, and woody at the base. These are 4 to 8 inches high, with the leaves on upper surface, shiny, coriaceous, dark green and underside paler. Flowers corymbose, light purple colour, corolla five cream-coloured petals, fragrantly perfumed, purplish at base. Capsule erect, depressed five-celled, five-valved, numerous seeds, linear, chaffy. It flowers May till August; leaves when dried have only a slight odour, but when fresh and rubbed are sweet-smelling; taste astringently sweetish and not disagreeably bitter.

---**Constituents**---Leaves contain various crystalline constituents, Chimaphilin, etc. also arbutin gum, resin, starch, pectic acid, extractive fatty matter, chlorophyll tannic acid, sugar, potassa, lime, iron, magnesia, chloride of sodium, sulphuric phosphoric and silicic acids.

---**Medicinal Action and Uses**---Diuretic, astringent, tonic, alterative. The fresh leaves, when bruised and applied to the skin, act as vesicants and rubefacients, of great use in cardiac and kidney diseases, chronic rheumatism and scrofula. The decoction is advantageous for chronic gonorrhoea, strangury, catarrh of the bladder, and a good cure for ascites. It is said to diminish lithic acid in the urine; for dropsy it is useful combined with other medicines; it is a substitute for uva-ursi and less obnoxious; said to be of value in diabetes, but this has not yet been confirmed; and it is very efficacious for skin diseases.

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---**Dosage**---Decoction, 1 to 4 fluid ounces three times daily. Fluid extract, B.P.C., 15 to 45 grains. Fluid extract, B.P.C., 3 parts syrup to 1 part fluid extract. Fluid extract, 1 to 45 grains.

Syrup. - Macerate 4 OZ. finely bruised leaves in 8 fluid ounces of water; let it stand 36 hours, strain till 1 pint of the fluid is obtained, evaporate to 1/2 pint, add 3/4 lb. sugar; dose, 1 to 2 tablepoonsful.

Dose of Chimaphilin, 1 to 5 grains. This is very valuable for scrofulous complaints, hence its name, 'King's Cure'; also used externally in the form of a decoction to unhealthy scrofulous sores.

C. maculata, or Spotted Wintergreen, is very similar, but the leaves are a deep olivegreen colour with greenish-white veins. When fresh and bruised they have a peculiar odour, which is lost on drying; taste pleasantly bitter, astringent and sweetish. A solution of perchloride of iron makes the infusion green colour. The leaves only are official, but all parts of the plant have active properties, and stem and leaves are often used together. The stem and root have a pungent taste and combine bitterness and astringency.

Medicinal properties, diuretic with an antiseptic influence on the urine, occasionally prescribed for cystitis. The best preparation is the fluid extract.