

Raspberry Leaf (*Rubus idaeus*)

Common Name: Red raspberry.

Description: The raspberry is a deciduous shrub that grows as high as six feet. It has woody stems with thorns, pale green leaves, white flowers, and edible red berries. The leaves are the part of the plant used in herbal medicine. They are a rich source of vitamin C and contain manganese, iron, and niacin.

Properties: Raspberry leaf has been used as a tea in folk medicine for hundreds of years. It has astringent and stimulant properties and is a popular remedy for many ailments.

Uses: The most common use of raspberry leaves is as a uterine tonic. It has the ability to relax tight uterine muscles and tighten relaxed uterine muscles. This has led to its use as a stimulant at the beginning of labor. Benefits of raspberry leaf for specific health conditions include treatment of bed-wetting, diarrhea, morning sickness, premenstrual syndrome and sore throat.

Doses: Raspberry leaf is used as a tea. It is available as a bottled beverage in many health-food stores.

Warnings: Since raspberry leaf is a uterine stimulant that can hasten childbirth, it should not be used on a regular basis, that is, more than two cups in any single day, or more than twice in any given week during the first trimester of pregnancy. If you use this herb during pregnancy, you should do so only under the supervision of a knowledgeable physician.

## **Herbal Allies for Pregnancy Problems**

**By Susun Weed**

Wise women believe that most of the problems of pregnancy can be prevented by attention to nutrition. Morning sickness and mood swings are connected to low blood sugar; backaches and severe labor pains often result from insufficient calcium; varicose veins, hemorrhoids, constipation, skin discoloration and anemia are evidence of lack of specific nutrients; preeclampsia, the most severe problem of pregnancy, is a form of acute malnutrition. Excellent nutrition includes pure water, controlled breath, abundant light, loving and respectful relationships, beauty and harmony in daily life, joyous thoughts and vital foodstuffs.

During pregnancy nutrients are required to create the cells needed to form two extra pounds of uterine muscle, the nerves, bones, organs, muscles, glands and skin of the fetus, several pounds of amniotic fluid, a placenta and a 50 percent increase in blood volume. In addition, extra kidney and liver cells are needed to process the waste of two beings instead of one.

Wild foods and organically grown produce, grains and herbs are the best source of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients needed during pregnancy. All the better if the expectant mother can get out and gather her own herbs: stretching, bending, breathing, moving, touching the earth, taking time to talk with the plants and to open herself to their spiritual world.

### **TONICS DURING PREGNANCY**

Wise women have recommended herbal tonics for childbearing for thousands of years. These herbs are empirically safe and notably effective. Tonic herbs improve general health by balancing and sustaining energy flow and focus in the body.

Tonics allay annoyances and prevent major problems. They can boost the supply of vital minerals and vitamins, increase energy and improve uterine tone. Some uterine tonics are contraindicated during

pregnancy or are restricted to the last few weeks of pregnancy.

The tonics indicated for pregnancy need to be used regularly; a tonic is to the cells much as exercise is to the muscles: not much use when done erratically. Of course even occasional use of tonics during pregnancy will be of benefit, since they do contain nourishing factors. Better benefit will come from using them 5 times a week or more.

Some simple suggestions to get into the habit of using tonics: pregnant women could replace the morning cup of coffee with a rich Nettle infusion. Or she could brew up some raspberry leaf tea and put it in the refrigerator to drink instead of soda, wine, or beer. Wild greens can be added to the diet. Women in many cultures have used the following herbs for centuries to have a healthier pregnancy.

#### RED RASPBERRY LEAVES (Rubus spp.)

Brewed as a tea or as an infusion, raspberry is the best known, most widely used, and safest of all uterine and pregnancy tonic herbs. It contains fragrine, an alkaloid which gives tone to the muscles of the pelvic region, including the uterus itself.

Most of the benefits ascribed to regular use of Raspberry tea through pregnancy are traced to the nourishing source of vitamins and minerals found in this plant and to the strengthening power of fragrine - an alkaloid which gives tone to the muscles of the pelvic region, including the uterus itself. Of special note are the rich concentration of vitamin C, the presence of vitamin E and the easily assimilated calcium and iron. Raspberry leaves also contain vitamins A and B complex and many minerals, including phosphorous and potassium.

The benefits of drinking a raspberry leaf brew before and throughout pregnancy include:

- ~ Increasing fertility in both men and women. Raspberry leaf is an excellent fertility herb when combined with Red Clover.
- ~ Preventing miscarriage and hemorrhage. Raspberry leaf tones the uterus and helps prevent miscarriage and postpartum hemorrhage from a relaxed or atonic uterus.
- ~ Easing of morning sickness. Many attest to raspberry leaves' gentle relief of nausea and stomach distress throughout pregnancy.
- ~ Reducing pain during labor and after birth. By toning the muscles used during labor and delivery, Raspberry leaf eliminates many of the reasons for a painful delivery and prolonged recovery. It does not, however, counter the pain of pelvic dilation.
- ~ Assisting in the production of plentiful breast milk. The high mineral content of Raspberry leaf assist in milk production, but its astringency may counter that for some women.
- ~ Providing a safe and speedy pariuntion. Raspberry leaf works to encourage the uterus to let go and function without tension. It does not strengthen contractions, but does allow the contracting uterus to work more effectively and so may make the birth easier and faster.