

Sarsaparilla (Smilax species, especially *Smilax aristolochiaefolia*, *Smilax febrifuga*, *Smilax ornate*, *Smilax reglii*)

CommonNames: Gray sarsaparilla, Mexico sarsaparilla, Vera Cruz sarsaparilla (*S. aristolochiaefolia*); Ecuadorian sarsaparilla, Guayaquil sarsaparilla (*S. aristolochiaefolia*); Costa Rican sarsaparilla, Jamaican sarsaparilla, red sarsaparilla (*S. ornate*); brown sarsaparilla, Honduras sarsaparilla (*S. reglii*).

Location: Sarsaparilla is a woody climbing vine found in rain forests around the world and also in temperate zones in Australia and China.

Description: Sarsaparilla has broad, oval-shaped leaves, tendrils, and green flowers. The fragrance of the root is considered pleasant, with a spicy sweet taste. The root is dug year-round for use in herbal preparations.

Properties: Since the 1500's, sarsaparilla has been used throughout the world to treat syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases. It has a reputation as a blood purifier and general tonic.

Uses: The natural steroidal glycosides found in sarsaparilla have made the herb popular with bodybuilders as an alternative to anabolic steroids for increasing muscle mass. Sarsaparilla also promotes good circulation, balances the glandular system, and stimulates the production of natural hormones. Benefits of sarsaparilla for specific health conditions include treatment of eczema and psoriasis, gout, menopause-related problems and diminished sex drive.

Doses: Sarsaparilla is available in capsules and fluidextracts. Tinctures of sarsaparilla are ineffective since the active chemical constituents of the herb are soluble in water but not in alcohol. It is also available as a tea.

Warnings: Large doses of the saponins in sarsaparilla may cause gastrointestinal irritation. Sarsaparilla increases the rate at which the body absorbs some prescription drugs. In general, people who take any prescription drugs regularly should avoid sarsaparilla. Because sarsaparilla stimulates the production of testosterone, men with prostate disorders should avoid it as well.