

Uva Ursi (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)

Common Names: Bearberry, hogberry, kinnikinnick.

Location: Native to Europe, it is naturalized throughout the temperate zones of the Northern hemisphere northward to the Arctic Circle. It thrives in sunny, damp conditions in grasslands, heaths, and thickets.

Description: Uva ursi is a low-lying evergreen shrub in the same family as the blueberry and the upland cranberry. It has long, trailing stems bearing dark green leaves that are dull on the lower side. Its bell shaped pink flowers produce small, glossy red berries in late summer.

Properties: The berries and leaves are used in herbal medicines.

Uses: The name uva ursi means “bear’s grape” in Latin, and comes from the fact that bears are fond of the fruit. According to British herbalist David Chevallier, the medicinal use of the plant was documented as early as the thirteenth century in the Welsh herbal *The Physicians of Myddfai*. Uva ursi leaves have been used for centuries as a mild diuretic and in the treatment of bladder and kidney infections. The leaves also have anesthetic properties that help to numb urinary-tract pain. Herbalists also recommend the herb as a diuretic for fluid retention, bloating, and swelling. Benefits of uva ursi for specific health conditions include treatment of the following: bladder infection, kidney disease, and prostatitis.

Doses: Uva ursi is available in the form of capsules or tablets, preferably standardized for arbutin. It also may be taken as a tea. Uva ursi is effective against the full range of urinary tract infections only if the urine is alkaline. To achieve this effect, you should avoid consuming acidic agents such as meat, vitamin C, and fruit juice, and you also should take ¼ teaspoon of baking soda in 1/3 cup of water with every dose of the herb.

Warnings: Most authorities caution that uva ursi should be avoided by people with chronic kidney disease, peptic ulcers, or duodenal ulcers. Uva ursi may aggravate gastroesophageal reflux disease. Herb expert James Duke reports that uva ursi sometimes aggravates tinnitus (ringing in the ears). If this effect occurs, it will be noticed after using the herb for two or three days. Ringing in the ears caused by uva ursi should wear off two or three days after the herb is discontinued. Nausea and vomiting may occur in sensitive adults and children. The herb may temporarily turn the urine green. This is a harmless effect. This herb should not be used by pregnant or nursing women, or by children under twelve. Avoid taking uva ursi for longer than a week. Take all kidney and bladder infections seriously, they can cause complications if not treated promptly. If symptoms of a urinary tract infection persist for more than forty-eight hours, you should always seek medical attention. If you develop symptoms such as high fever, chills, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or severe back pain, get medical assistance immediately.