

Expert Herbal Reality Resource

Rubus

Names

Botanical Name: *Rubus idaeus* L.

Family: Rosaceae

Common names: Raspberry, Hindberry, Bramble of Mount Ida



Description

Raspberry is a deciduous biennial shrub that can grow up to 2 meters in height. It has many thick, reddish, woody stems that are usually prickly. The pale green leaves are pinnate with 3-7 oval, toothed leaflets and have white hairs on the underside. The flowers are white and appear in dense clusters from spring to summer. The fruits are red.

The plant is native to Europe and Asia, and is found in mountainous regions in cold climates. It is a common garden plant that is grown from suckers. The fruits are a common food, while the leaves are used medicinally. The fruit is collected when ripe in the summer, and the leaves are collected in the early summer.

Constituents

Leaf

- Flavonoids (up to 5%): kaempferol and quercetin
- Tannins (up to 10%): gallo- and ellagi-tannins
- Phenolic acids
- Volatile oil
- Minerals: iron, manganese, potassium, zinc, copper, calcium, magnesium, phosphorous
- vitamin C

Fruit

- Anthocyanins
- Tannins
- Flavonoids
- Vitamins A, B, C, E
- Pectin

Traditional use

Red raspberry leaves have been used as a medicine for thousands of years, largely for gynaecological applications. The leaf has been included in the British Pharmaceutical Codex, where it was indicated for heavy menstrual bleeding. Although it has been a favourite of midwives for easing labour and encouraging milk production.

Red raspberry leaf has a history of being used for diarrhoea, where it was drunk as a decoction. It has also been used for wound care. The infusion was used as a wash for conjunctivitis, bleeding gums, and a lotion for ulcers and other wounds. It can also be applied as a gargle for sore throats. A poultice of the leaf, combined with slippery elm, is recommended by Grieve for wounds and burns and to draw infection (1).

Culpeper does not mention the use of the leaf, but only the fruit. However, this was also applied in instances of digestive and dental complaints as well as avoiding miscarriage. He recommends the syrup of the fruit to “prevent sickness and retching”.

Traditional actions

Western herbal medicine actions:

- Astringent
- Vulneraries



What practitioners say

Red raspberry leaf is best known as a safe and widely used partus praeparator, which Trickey recommends using in the last 5 months of pregnancy (2). Not only does this support the uterus in preparation for giving birth and ease the birth process, but it also helps in involuting the uterus after delivery, and the production of breast milk.

The leaf is also recommended in cases of heavy and painful menstrual bleeding, as well as the post-operation care of the uterus. This is due to its tonic and vulnerary action. It may also be applied in cases of vaginal discharge, although it is important to seek medical attention if discharge has changed.

The actions of raspberry leaf are parturient (or partus praeparator), it works as a uterine tonic, astringent, vulnerary for healing wounds, nutritive and uterine spasmolytic. It is also sometimes used for the symptoms of endometriosis. In pregnancy it is usually effective for morning sickness and nausea that extends into the second trimester.

The tea can be made into a wash to aid the healing of wounds, burns, bleeding gums, tonsillitis, and conjunctivitis and acts as helpful as a mouthwash for inflammation of the mouth and throat. It is also useful as an eye lotion for conjunctivitis.

Evidence

There have been remarkably few clinical trials for the efficacy and safety of red raspberry leaf, especially considering its popularity. For example a study found 600 Norwegian women found that around 5.7% of pregnant women most often to “prepare the uterus for labour” (7). However a review in 2009 found only 12

studies that met the research criteria, where only 5 were clinical trials and the rest were either in vitro or animal studies (3).

One of the first studies, in 1941, was an animal study that found several constituents that were conducted on non-pregnant rabbits and cats (4). This research found that relaxed muscles were toned by the extract, while toned muscles were relaxed. This resulted in the conclusion that the effects of raspberry leaf were unpredictable. It was in 1970 after another animal study that researchers suggested that raspberry leaf may be beneficial as it produces more coordinated uterine contractions (5).



The few clinical studies have found very little statistical difference between those who had raspberry leaf treatment and those who had the placebo. One study found a statistical significance in a slightly shorter second stage of labour for the treatment group. This study also observed a lower rate of forceps delivery in the treatment group (6).

Safety

Although there is a limited amount of information, no drug interactions or safety concerns have been highlighted.

As raspberry leaf contains tannins, its consumption may interfere with mineral absorption.

Preparation

Tea, tincture

Dosage

Tincture: 2-4ml three times per day (1:5)

Dried: 2 tsp with 1 cup boiling water, one to three times per day

Parts used

Leaf, fruit

References

1. Grieve M. *A Modern Herbal*. New York: Dover Publ.; 1971.
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3. Holst L, Haavik S, Nordeng H. Raspberry leaf – Should it be recommended to pregnant women?. *Complement Ther Clin Pract*. 2009;15(4):204-208. doi:10.1016/j.ctcp.2009.05.003
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6. Simpson M, Parsons M, Greenwood J, Wade K. Raspberry leaf in pregnancy: Its safety and efficacy in labour. *J Midwifery Womens Health*. 2001;46(2):51-59. doi:10.1016/s1526-9523(01)00095-2
7. Edwards S, Rocha I, Williamson E, Heinrich M. *Phytopharmacy*. Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Inc.; 2015.