

A Tree Called Myrtle

Myrtle is the nickname for a family of shrubs and trees collectively known as Myrtaceae. They almost entirely located in tropical regions, particularly in America and Australia. Myrtle can be found in the Mediterranean, North Africa, and Iran as well.

The Tree

Myrtle is distinguished by evergreen leaves that contain aromatic volatile oils. Many varieties of myrtle produce flashy blossoms, gums, and resins. The tree produces black berries which, along with the leaves, are used particularly for aromatherapy.

Health Advantages

The application of myrtle can be traced back to the time of the ancient Greeks. It was said that athletes wore evergreen wreaths of myrtle leaves atop their heads during the Olympics. Believing that it was a symbol of immortality, they also used it in many love potions and treatments for various ailments.

During the time of the Roman Empire, myrtle was used to treat respiratory and urinary problems. The Egyptians used it to treat nervous afflictions. French women drank tea made from crushed myrtle leaves to preserve the youthfulness of their appearance and their overall vigor. And at one point, there were even some talks of the myrtle tree as a cure for cancer, but little evidence was found concerning this.

Conventionally, myrtle was used to treat coughs and various types of respiratory infections, such as bronchitis. Thanks to its astringent properties, it has also gained a reputation for promoting good digestion, treating urinary tract disorders, and prevention infections in wounds. According to recent laboratory studies, the herb contains substances that are anti-inflammatory, making it a good astringent compound. This likely accounts for the plant's enduring use for wounds and coughs.

In addition to healing wounds, myrtle is said to be anti-infective and is a good tonic for speeding up the healing process. In the Middle East, it has long been perceived by traditional healers as a useful herb for diabetes. The 1980s saw scientists putting the myrtle herb under the microscope in an attempt to identify the active ingredients that lends it its various medicinal properties.

Results of one study indicated that extract from the herb can decrease blood sugar in mice. This explains the association associating myrtle with diabetes. However, there is still no concrete proof that the herb is safe to use and effective for people who have the disease.

Directions for Use

Myrtle extract is created from plant's leaves and seeds. Most tests have shown positive results if the plant extract is taken orally and in liquid form. A standard dose is usually around one to two milliliters of the essential oil daily. Be sure that you ask your doctor first before taking it.

Topical formulations are also used although not common. Again, make sure to use this plant only under your doctor's supervision.

There are two types of myrtle. Take special care that you do not mix up the two. *Myrtus communis*, the "true" myrtle, is the plant described here. The other variety, called "Madagascar" myrtle (*Eugenia jambolana*) is a totally different plant and has entirely different effects on the body.

Myrtle is understood to work well with other herbs and nutritional supplements. However, do not use it if you're taking insulin or oral sulfonylureas. The herb may increase the blood glucose, lowering the effect of these medications.