



Aloe Vera (aloe barbadensis)



Family

Aloe belongs to the Liliaceae (Lily) family and is a succulent.

Habitat

Originates from the African continent and now grows world-wide. In cool regions it can be grown indoors.

Description

Aloe's orangey red tubular flowers are formed once the plant is 3 or 4 years old. The side shoots are used to propagate from.

Constituents

Oils and resins, phenols and phenolic glycosides, anthraquinones, sterols, polysaccharides, saponins, gelonins, chromones, specific sugars, mucilage, fibre, 18 amino acids, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, selenium, silicon, sodium, tin, zinc, and vitamins A, B, B2, B6 and C.

History

Hildegard of Bingen (12th century) wrote of aloe juice being an effective treatment of hepatitis (infectious jaundice) and of the treatment of tooth decay and gum disease by the inhaling (through a straw) of smoke from burning powdered aloe and myrrh.

Native Americans drank the juice of the plant (Aloe Vera: *agave americana*) and used it to heal wounds and abrasions and soothe dry or sunburned skin.⁽¹⁾

Cleopatra used aloe in her skin-care regime. Mahatma Ghandi says it was aloe that kept him going during his long fasting periods.

Uses

Aloe is considered to be one of the best healing herbs in existence. Aloe is believed to help organs and tissues recover from radiation and to help cleanse the liver, spleen, kidney and bladder. Rub the juice or gel into the scalp if dandruff or other scalp conditions are present. Fillet the gel off the green outer skin and the whiteish layer immediately next to it and use only the gel. Use in this way as a wonderful topical aid to relieve burns and sunburn and to stimulate the skin to heal. Aloe juice is soothing to the digestive tract. It is used in good quality skin products including eye gel and mascara.

Animal Care

For animal care Vet Dr Viv Harris writes in her book *The Healthy Animal Handbook - Holistic health for cats and dogs*⁽²⁾ that it is vital to know that a lot of Aloe Vera products available on the market have a preservative in them that is toxic and sometimes lethal to cats. Source your product carefully and get expert advice. With that caution in mind either the diluted gel or the dried juice can be used. It is anti-bacterial and anti-fungal and also a blood cleanser. Very useful externally as a wound and especially a burn treatment for which you use the inner, clear gel directly from a freshly cut leaf. Used internally as a laxative as well as soothing the digestive tract and helping normalise its function. Said to improve digestion. Aloe has immunostimulant ingredients; it has been used in cats with feline leukaemia with positive results. If you are gathering your own herbs it is important that they are spray free, and ideally organically grown, and not gathered from the side of the road as car fumes can pollute the plants, making them toxic to ingest. Do not overuse - probably all medicines have the potential to be toxic at certain levels, even the 'safe' ones.

Warning

Pregnant women should consult their naturopathic physician or medical doctor because of the laxative qualities of the drink, especially for women expected to have trouble carrying their babies to full term. Healthy, pregnant women may find the juice helpful for relieving constipation, but should avoid taking it in large quantities during the last trimester. Avoid when breast-feeding as your baby may suffer colic pains and diarrhoea. Ingestion also to be avoided by women who have heavy menstrual bleeding.⁽³⁾

Overdosage may cause electrolyte and fluid imbalance as it does in skin care if too much is used. When making your own skin care products use it in a ratio of around 8% of the formula so there is no excess which would, conversely, create dryness in the product.

Contraindication

Aloe vera shouldn't be used by children under 12 years, by people with possible appendicitis or cirrhosis of the liver, intestinal obstruction, acutely inflamed intestinal diseases e.g. Crohn's disease, ulcerated colitis, or abdominal pain of unknown origin.

Although there are more than 200 Aloe species, this information sheet is about Aloe Vera Barbadensis. As a succulent, you may have already noted that the leaf repairs itself after being cut or injured. All succulents have amazing self repairing and water holding abilities.

According to extensive research being conducted on this remarkable healing plant, Aloe Vera is capable of penetrating our skin up to 5 times faster than water. The plant captures water in an internal matrix of unique long – chain polysaccharides; which enables this group of drought tolerant plants to swell to around 130% their usual size as they absorb water. Aloe Vera is also capable of penetrating tissues up to 7 layers deep which makes this a plant most valuable in skin care and when taken internally, its unique polysaccharides stimulate the immune system and the cell membranes.

One study published in “international immunopharmacology (1995)”, showed that Aloe Vera polysaccharides exhibited potent macrophage - activating activities.

Taking Aloe Vera internally eases joint inflammation throughout the body from the inside out. (One needs to drink Aloe Vera for several weeks to experience this.) It also enhances the secretion of digestive enzymes and is helpful for many digestive disorders, like acid reflux, IBS, and ulcers, where it soothes and protects gut lining. It also inhibits in some people histamines, which are responsible for allergic irritations and many skin problems. It has soothing, hydrating, cooling and moistening effects and accelerates the regeneration of new skin tissue. It helps promote healthier skin and hair. Keratin the primary protein of hair and nails consists of amino acids, oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen and sulfur. Aloe Vera's chemical makeup is similar to that of keratin, it rejuvenates the hair, giving more elasticity and preventing splitting. It also revitalizes the scalp, being helpful to the healing of dandruff and psoriasis.

Aloe Vera is a nutrient plant, full of vitamins, minerals, and amino acids. Aloe also contains plant hormones which stimulate cell replication, making this a most significant regenerative skin, hair, mouth and immune system herb. If consuming a fresh plant extract, it is important to wash off the yellow sap portion, as this is detrimental – the latex of this yellow sap kills cells and causes digestive problems.

Aloe Vera may be drunk as the commercially available juice, but be sure to buy superior brands as many are extremely watered down products. For skin and haircare, it is available as liquid, clear gel (not the green kind), infused oil, and powder. For extensive research articles on Aloe Vera, go to “Google Scholar”.

1 - excerpts from Spirit Herbs - Native American Healing by Mary Dean Atwood, Sterling Publishing Co., New York, 1998, ISBN: 0-8069-3862-5.

2 - excerpts from Dr Viv Harris' book 'The Healthy Animal Handbook' - Holistic Health for Cats and Dogs, published by Random House, New Zealand in 2006, ISBN: 1-86941-783-6.

3 - excerpts from Karina Hilterman's book 'A Handful of Herbs' ISBN: 0-9751613-0-X.

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