



PHOTO BY SCOTT KLOOS

## CASCADE OREGON GRAPE TEA

*The root of this abundant plant improves liver and digestive function, clears itchy skin conditions and speeds healing of intestinal infections*

*This information was compiled from the entry on the Cascade Oregon Grape in Scott Kloos' new book from Timber Press, "Pacific Northwest Medicinal Plants."*

### How to identify

The Cascade Oregon Grape ranges from 4 to 24 inches tall, with stems whose tops are lined with pointy-tipped bud scales. It has pinnately compound leaves, each with 9 to 19 thick, dark green, oval to lance-shaped holly-like leaflets with spiny, coarsely saw-tooth edges. From early spring to early summer, it will have yellow-flowered clusters up to 8 inches long that sit above the leaves. Look for three greenish-yellow outer bracts, 6 bright yellow sepals and 6 bright yellow 2-lobed petals that alternate in 5 whorls of 3. They will eventually ripen into purplish blue sour-tasting berries with large black seeds.

The part of the plant you harvest is the rhizome, or root. A rhizome is a type of root that grows horizontally underground, and emits lateral shoots that grow into individual plants above the earth's surface that are connected by a root network underground.

### Where, when and how to wildcraft

This shade-tolerant plant prefers the semi-open forests west of the Cascades and can be found from sea level to middle elevations.

You can collect the rhizomes from mid-spring to mid-autumn.

From a good-sized stand, find a non-flowering plant that calls out to you. Grasp its stem and give a gentle tug. If the rhizome moves easily, continue pulling and follow it until the rhizome breaks or until you reach a junction point where you can cut the rhizome free. Remove the leaves and replant the crown. Cut the rhizomes into 1/2- to 1-inch-long pieces to dry for tea.

Dry the root pieces on a screen or in a hanging paper bag, just make sure to keep them out of direct sunlight, and if in a bag,

make sure there is plenty of airflow around it.

### Medicinal uses

The Oregon grape alters the internal mucosa and speeds the removal of waste products in the blood to make the terrain less hospitable to infectious agents.

Take Oregon grape root tea or tincture for giardia, staph, or salmonella infections. These preparations also stimulate liver metabolism, cleanse the blood, and clear damp heat. Take them if you have food sensitivities or allergies, are prone to constipation, wake up feeling groggy and listless in the morning, have bad breath with a coated tongue, and/or have chronic itchy skin conditions.

Skin conditions are often related to liver congestion or impaired hepatic function; if the liver cannot adequately filter toxins and other impurities from the blood, the unprocessed waste products are eliminated through the skin.

Oregon grape root tea can ease psoriasis, acne, eczema and fungal outbreaks such as athlete's foot or jock itch.

Kloos recommends drinking a cup of Cascade Oregon grape root tea before meals, as it stimulates digestive juices and improves the body's ability to break down food and assimilate nutrients.

### Herbal preparation: Root tea

1) In saucepan, combine 1 part by weight of dried root and 32 parts by volume of cold water.

2) Bring water to a boil, cover the pot, and simmer on low heat for 15 minutes.

3) Strain and drink. You can store unused portion in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours.

Drink 6 to 8 fluid ounces 3 times per day. You can stop using the remedy when you begin to feel the beneficial effects, which Kloos said for most will take about 6 to 8 weeks.

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forest. There's a remembrance deep within us that comes from being connected in that way, which is something that – if you go back in time in our human evolution, it has not been that long since we have been apart from that.

One of the best ways I've found is just doing the things that I talk about in this book, which is going out and identifying the plants, making connections with them, harvesting them to make medicine and ingesting that medicine that we make from those wild plants that brings us more into that relationship.

**E.G.:** *I wasn't surprised to see St. John's wort and lemon balm among the remedies in your book, but I was less familiar with Douglas fir and Oregon grape being used medicinally. I did a quick Google search, and it turns out they've been used medicinally for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. But I was wondering, are all the remedies outlined in your book backed by peer-reviewed studies that show their medicinal quality, or do we need more research in this realm of medicine?*

**S.K.:** For some, there is that peer-reviewed research, but the problem with that is that there is no money involved. People doing that kind of research, mostly, are looking for something they can patent and make money from. But there are some – in fact St. John's wort has had a lot of studies done on it that prove what we already knew about its uses.

Most of the information is based on traditional uses over time, whether it's from the native people here, who are still working with and using these medicines, or from similar plants that grow in Europe or on the East Coast that people have been working with for a long time, but interestingly enough, I have the sense that this area of the world just may be the place where we *least* understand the medicinal properties of the plants.

On the East Coast, when the Europeans arrived, there was a lot of interaction between the Native people and the Europeans and sharing of knowledge, and for obvious reasons, that willingness changed by the time the Europeans got to this side of the continent. So we're learning about some of this stuff on our own, and there is still a lot of plants out there that we don't know the medicinal properties hardly at all, if at all. So it's kind of an exciting time and place to be an herbalist, if that's a direction you want to go about learning – increasing the knowledge about plants.

But the plants in the book are pretty well known. For myself, with the direct experience that I have, and also my peers and colleagues and people that I respect who have done a lot of work with these medicines, the scientific studies are kind of icing on the cake, but still valid information to have. And if it helps other people feel more confident in using these plants as medicines, then I'm all for it. But I'm definitely not into the idea of people doing research and then turning the medicines into a huge money-making commodity.

One of the problems with some of the scientific research, St. John's wort is a good example: In Europe, they do a lot of scientific research with the plant because it's an accepted part of medical-doctor usage to some degree, where it isn't so

much here, and so with St. John's wort, they did studies where they said, we're going to find the active ingredient. And they thought, "OK, it's this oil called hypericin," and they started cultivating plants that were higher in hypericin, and what they found was, five or 10 years later, they figured out it's not hypericin; it's this other thing, and then they spent all this energy, and in the end, what matters is the whole plant. We can't think of the plant in that non-holistic way.

**E.G.:** *Can you explain what wildcrafting is?*

**S.K.:** We use the term "wildcrafting" to distinguish from harvesting because harvesting, in my mind, implies a mentality of: Everything is there for the taking by humans, and so we just take it. The "craft" part of wildcrafting is the art of connecting with not only the plant, but the ecosystem where it grows and understanding all the different facets that go into creating the conditions for that plant to thrive.

For one, we don't want to harvest endangered or rare plants. Two, you want to make sure you can correctly identify the plant. And then, making a whole range of assessments that I describe in the book, regarding the viability of the plant and who or what else depends on the plant. If there's a plant that a certain caterpillar, moth uses to lay its eggs, and the larvae grow there, and we harvest a bunch of it and there's not enough for them, that has ramifications that cascade to other animals that might eat that insect. So we want to do it in a way that's careful, that will allow the plant and the stand of plants to thrive so that ultimately the goal is to have there be more there than when we started.

**E.G.:** *In your book, when you lay out how you approach medicinal uses, you wrote that you avoid the "What is this good for?" mentality. So how do you approach the medicinal question?*

**S.K.:** I don't like to think about it that way, but that's what ends up happening when I take people on out on trips; they ask, "What's that good for?" And "What's that good for?" And that's coming from that same place I was talking about where we're just looking for the magic bullet that's going to heal one thing. We need to look at it more holistically, and the way I like to think about it is: developing relationships with the plants. For me, the plants have been my teachers, on all levels. They can help teach the body how to function in a more harmonious way, on the physical level and then also on emotional and spiritual levels as well, developing relationships with them helps us on that level also.

**E.G.:** *And maybe this is what you mean when you say "psycho-spiritual" properties of plants (the topic of his next book), but for someone who is unfamiliar with herbal medicine, can you explain what that means?*

**S.K.:** That's a primary focus of my work. A good example would be hawthorn, which is blooming around town right now. It's an excellent remedy for the heart on the physical level, and then on the emotional level, there are all these teachings it can bring. It helps soothe a wounded heart and helps soften a hardened heart, and it teaches us how to be in touch with our vulnerability.