

Evan Storaasli
November 30, 2005

Devil's Club

Family Name: Ginseng/Aralia
Family Name: Araliaceae

Latin Name: *Oplopanax horridum*

Common Names: Devil's Club

Related Species: *Panax quinquefolium* (Ginseng)

Body System Affiliations:

1. Digestive
 2. Nervous
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Botanical Description:

Deciduous shrub 3'-10' tall. Leaves are 5-7 palmate and 4"-14" wide with alternate placement. All stems, petioles, and leaf veins have dense thorns up to 3/8" long. Flower is green-white and small. Fruit is a small, red, two-seeded berry 4-5mm wide. Fruit grows in 10"long clusters.

Ecology:

Habitat: Moist rich soils and along rivers and streams.

Range: Alaska to Oregon and East to Michigan

Native: Most all of Western United States and Canada

Propagation:

Devil's Club is very difficult to grow outside of its habitat.

Harvest:

Dig near base for rhizomes and roots. Cut, but only a little from each plant. Then strip the bark off of the roots and rhizomes. Be careful of the surrounding as the plant often grows in fragile soil and on streamsides.

Season: Fall and winter

Indigenous Use:

Medicine:

Part used: Root and rhizome bark

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Medicinal Actions: Anti-candida, Medicinal Information: Anti-candida, antibacterial, and antimycobacterial. (1) Hypoglycemic, cathartic, emetic (in large doses), stomachic, analgesic, and diaphoretic. (2) Purgative, anti-fatigue and stimulant. (3)

Indications: Lethargy, tuberculosis, diabetes, stomach/digestive trouble, and colds as well as fever.

Body system associations: Digestive and nervous.

Preparation: Boil root bark for an hour or so in water, strain

Application: Decoction

Pharmacy: 3 times or so a day

Cautions: Do not use in very large doses due to its hypoglycemic characteristics. (3)

Personal Experience:

Medicine:

Part Used: Root bark

Medicinal Actions: Stimulant, stomachic

Indications: Tiredness, upset stomach

Body System Associations: Nervous and digestive

Harvest:

Site Location: Park in Puyallup, Washington. Early November.

Site Description: Fairly deep in this publicly owned park. Large thicket of the plant in a low stream valley. Plant was with other wetland ground cover shrubs as well as fir and cedar trees.

However, it dominated the direct area where it grew. Thicket was along a lightly used hiking trail. Only signs of small animal usage in this area (raccoons, squirrels, mice, etc.). I chose this site because it was well know to me and it was an area that had healthy growth of devil's club.

Technique: Located some of the larger plants and dug with a knife to base and located roots. Cut root and pulled out of ground and moved to different plant. Harvested from 7-8 plants.

Processing: Spent an hour or more cutting and peeling root bark away from whole of root. Then cut into smaller pieces and put on screen to dry over a heater.

Storage: Stored dry in airtight container until use is desired.

Experience: Really valued the serenity that I felt at the streamside in that park, and the smell of the plant was very fragrant and memorable. Fragrance was also evident while peeling the root bark. The harvest was very gratifying and cleansing.

Application/Preparation/Pharmacy:

Application: Decoction with about ¾ ounce of dry plant and 4 cups water.

Preparation: Boiled dry matter for an hour

Pharmacy: Drank three cups of decoction over course of 6 hours.

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Reason: Mainly to experience the plant.

Experience: Felt more energetic and focused. Initial digestive reaction was unpleasant but that passed quickly and digestive system seemed to calm down very nicely.

Cautions: When harvesting be aware of spines on plant. Also, habitat is typically swampy and difficult to move in without damaging some plants. Take extra precaution in movement in Devil's Club's habitat.

Other Notes of Interest: Plant is considered very valuable by native cultures of the region because of its multitude of medical actions as well as spiritual qualities. Used to aid fasting during vision quests.

Cautions: Again, be very respectful to the fragile environment where this plant grows. Treat the harvesting and preparation the plant with respect because it is a very sacred plant of Native people. On a physical level beware of the plant's spines, as they are quite painful.