

[Leaflet advertising devil's claw as a herbal cleanser, detoxifier and for rheumatic conditions].

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DEVIL'S CLAW

An ancient African herbal cleanser and detoxifier

Devil's Claw has been used in South West Africa for centuries and more recently in other parts of the world against rheumatic conditions and other ailments



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The complete Devil's Claw plant (left) comprises flowers, roots and tubers, the last being used as a herbal remedy. The plant gets its name from the seed pods (above).

Devil's Claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*) is a plant native to South West Africa, which grows in the Kalahari Desert and the grasslands of Namibia. Its name, Devil's Claw, derives from the claw-like shape of its seed pods, which are about the size of a hand and have 'fingers' armed with vicious-looking, hook-like thorns. (These often get embedded in the mouths of grazing animals, preventing them from eating.) The plant has fragile, creeping stems and, when the rains come, produces trumpet-shaped flowers, rather like those of the bindweed, which are a red-violet colour.

To survive the long periods of drought that affect the areas where it grows, Devil's Claw puts down roots as far as a metre into the soil, and produces brown tubers at different levels underground, which store water. It is these secondary roots which are used as a herbal remedy.

HISTORY AND RESEARCH

Devil's Claw has been used for centuries by the natives of Namibia for various ailments, including malaria, stomach troubles, gall-stones, rheumatism and arthritis (see CASEBOOK - ARTHRITIS). Women in labour drink Devil's Claw tea to help them give birth more easily, and the root is applied to wounds to stimulate healing.

Its discovery by the West began early this century when a German doctor observed that a tribal witch-doctor cured a very sick patient with the root. He sent samples to some laboratories in Germany, and research in Europe (particularly in Germany) and in America has gone on ever since.

In 1958, the root's anti-inflammatory action was demonstrated. One trial by a German professor resulted in the discovery that, after the use of Devil's Claw for five weeks, arthritic joints became freely movable again and swelling was reduced. He, and other doctors, noted that the healing process continued after treatment had ceased. A Dr Siegmund Schmidt prescribed it over a period of a year for more than a hundred of his rheumatic patients and found that it gave valuable support and that, in some cases, orthodox drugs could be dispensed with entirely. He further concluded that Devil's Claw 'stimulates the detoxifying and

AVAILABILITY AND USAGE

Devil's Claw, and combination remedies containing it, are available from health food stockists in a variety of forms:

- dried
- in filter bags
- as tablets
- as capsules (dried, ground or as an extract)
- ground and preserved in a liquid

To prepare Devil's Claw tea from filter bags, boiling water should be poured over the bag and left to infuse overnight. The next day, a third of the liquid should be taken ten minutes before each meal: morning, lunch-time and evening. It tastes very bitter. To avoid this, Devil's Claw tablets or capsules can be taken instead or, alternatively, the fresh-ground root in a liquid suspension.

A recommended dosage is three 250g capsules (or their equivalent in another form) taken three times a day before meals during the painful phase of rheumatism, reducing to four a day when the pain is lessened. This should be continued for three or four weeks, followed by several weeks' break. The remedy should be discontinued if there is no improvement after one month.

Two or three tablets, crushed to a paste with hot water, can be used as an external arthritis application.

Devil's Claw is safe for the majority of people to take. However, diabetics should only take it when instructed by a medical practitioner (see CASEBOOK - DIABETES).



Cutting fresh roots in the desert. They will be preserved in a wine base.

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protective mechanisms of the body'. It has recently been discovered that the root contains some 40 constituents.

MEDICAL APPLICATIONS

Many sufferers from rheumatism, which affects the soft tissues, and rheumatoid arthritis, which affects the joints, have found Devil's Claw of benefit; documentary evidence indicates that six out of ten arthritis patients obtain relief from this remedy. It has an anti-inflammatory action, reducing pain, swelling and stiffness of inflamed joints and muscles, seems to cleanse and detoxify the body and stimulates the body's immune system. (Dr A Vogel, a Swiss naturopath, particularly recommends Devil's Claw for

counteracting modern-day pollution.) Devil's Claw can be used in combination with a wholefood diet and relaxation therapy, both of which seem to have a beneficial effect on rheumatic conditions.

Devil's Claw helps the body to excrete excess fluid, and has been used to treat kidney, liver and bladder disorders and certain intestinal and circulatory problems. It can be soothing to skin irritations.

Our thanks to Ortis for their help in providing the photographs.

DEVIL'S CLAW COMBINATIONS

Natural ingredients combined with Devil's Claw to relieve rheumatism and rheumatoid arthritis include: herbs, like garlic or white willow, chosen for their cleansing or anti-inflammatory properties; cod-liver oil, which is rich in vitamins A and D and essential fatty acids; mineral-rich kelp (a seaweed); vitamin B₆; and vitamin B₅ (pantothenic acid) (see CASEBOOK - ARTHRITIS; REMEDIES - GARLIC, WHITE WILLOW, FISH OILS).

FURTHER READING

About Devil's Claw by Maurice Hanssen (Thorsons)

GETTING IN TOUCH

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Devil's Claw come as tablets, capsules and in liquid suspension.

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