

Butcher's Broom

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Common names

- **Butcher's Broom**
- **Kneeholy, Knee Holly, Kneeholm**
- **Jew's Myrtle**
- **Sweet Broom**
- **Pettigree**

Butcher's Broom - botanical name *Ruscus aculeatus* L., belonging to the plant family Liliaceae

Butcher's broom is a low-growing common evergreen shrub. It is widely distributed, from Iran to the Mediterranean and the southern United States. The plant develops edible shoots. Butcher's broom has tough, erect, striated stems with false thorny leaves. The name of this plant should not be confused with broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) or Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*).

Butcher's broom is fairly common in this country and is known by other common names. The herb itself is a transplanted species and was originally a native plant found around the entire Mediterranean region from the Azores all the way to Iran in the Persian Gulf. The traditional and historical use of the butcher's broom herb is also a long one and many cultures in areas where the plant grew native used it in a variety of herbal preparations. The ancient Greek herbalist Dioscorides suggested the use of the butcher's broom as a diuretic and laxative herb as early as the first century.



Traditional/Ethnobotanical uses

R. aculeatus was given its common name, butcher's broom, because its stiff twigs were bound together and used by butchers in Europe to keep their cutting boards clean. The plant has a long history of use. More than 2000 years ago, it was noted as a laxative, diuretic, and a phlebotherapeutic (beneficial to veins) agent. Extracts, decoctions, and poultices have been used throughout the ages, but the medicinal use of this plant did not become common until the last century. Early investigations during the 1950s indicated that extracts of butcher's broom could induce vasoconstriction and therefore might have use in the treatment of circulatory diseases. The increasing popularity of natural and herbal remedies in Europe in the 1970s reaffirmed its position in modern medicine.

A variety of compounds have been isolated from butcher's broom. The 2 primary active saponin compounds are ruscogenin and neoruscogenin. Butcher's broom is the active component in several formulations and topical

treatments for venous diseases and venous insufficiency, such as varicose veins and hemorrhoids. The German Commission E approves oral use for supportive therapy for discomforts of chronic venous insufficiency and complaints of hemorrhoids. Butcher's broom also may be useful for orthostatic hypotension.

Clinical Summary: Derived from the root of the plant. Taken orally or applied topically, this herb has been used for varicose veins, hemorrhoids, and lymphedema. Ruscogenin, one of the major constituents of Butcher's broom, demonstrated anti-inflammatory effects in vivo. Clinical studies have revealed efficacy of Butcher broom extracts in controlling lymphedema and chronic venous insufficiency.

INDICATIONS:

Butcher's broom may be effective in the treatment of the following conditions:

- Edema of the legs. This herb is particularly useful for people who are on their feet for a long period of time in the course of a day. By drawing water out of cells and perhaps inhibiting electrolyte reabsorption in the kidney, butcher's broom helps to alleviate excess water retention in the feet and legs.
- Leg discomfort. Butcher's broom contains compounds closely resembling steroids, which help to reduce inflammation.
- Peripheral vascular disease. By increasing circulation of the blood, butcher's broom may be of benefit in the treatment of disorders characterized by reduced circulation. Raynaud's disease & Buerger's disease are two such disorders.
- Hemorrhoids. Butcher's broom is frequently combined with Witch Hazel as an ointment. When applied locally to the anus, butcher's broom may bring about tremendous relief from the pain of hemorrhoids.
- Bronchial asthma. It has been reported that butcher's broom, when combined with black- or green-leaf tea, may improve inhalation and exhalation.
- Poison immunity. Scientists have discovered that sparteine, one of the main components in butcher's broom, inhibits the proteins in snake venom and thus is a potent treatment for detoxification of some snake bites.
- Varicose veins. Due to vasoconstriction and steroidal content, butcher's broom may help to alleviate the unpleasant symptoms of varicose veins.
- Hypotension. Butcher's broom raises blood pressure and thus is a good treatment for individuals suffering from chronic hypotension. Sparteine extends the rhythmical expansion of the cavities of the heart during which they fill with blood and hence there is an increase in diastolic blood pressure.
- Orthostatic hypotension (also known as postural hypotension) is a condition where one's blood pressure drops when arising from a seated or lying position.

Chronic orthostatic hypotension (OH) is frequently a severely debilitating disease that affects large groups of the population with autonomic insufficiency--the elderly; patients with diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and chronic fatigue syndrome; and anyone on drugs that affect the autonomic nervous system.

Unfortunately, even though more than 60 medications are currently being used to treat OH, none of them is particularly or consistently effective. Butcher's broom, a phytotherapeutic agent that is well known in Europe, may, however, change this. Its vasoconstrictive and venotonic properties make it ideally suited to treat the pooling of blood in the limbs, lack of venous tone, and lack of neurally mediated vasoconstriction that frequently characterize OH. Although it has never been suggested as a treatment for OH, it already has a long, proven record of use in Europe for treating a variety of circulatory disorders. J Altern Complement Med. 2000 Dec;6(6):539-49. Redman DA. American University, Washington, DC, USA.

Mechanism of Action

Butcher's broom steroidal saponins may be responsible for stimulating the post-junctional alpha-adrenergic receptors of the smooth muscle cells of the vascular wall and produce vasoconstriction. It may also have anti-inflammatory effects and increase lymphatic flow.

Herb-Drug Interactions

Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAO-I): Due to the tyramine constituent in butcher's broom avoid concurrent use with MAO-I such as phenylzine (Nardil®), tranylcypromine (Parnate®).

Anticoagulants / Antiplatelets: Butcher's broom contains coumarins that may inhibit platelet activity and

potentiate response to anticoagulants.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

Consumption of butcher's broom is not recommended in the presence of hypertension or during pregnancy. Sparteine may increase uterine contraction and thus is not recommended when hypertension or pregnancy is present.



References

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Sincerely,

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