

From our friends at "Back to Herbs"



eFlash



Marshmallow Root

Both marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*) leaf and root are used in commercial preparations, while herbal formulations are made from either the dried root or leaf. Marshmallow root is more popular in America, while the leaves are more so in Europe. All parts of the plant are used in various ways, i.e., medicinal, decorative, culinary, and cosmetic purposes, but the root is mainly used for medicinal purposes. Marshmallow root is rich in mucilage, paraffin, pectin, lecithin, quercetin, salicylic acid, tannins, amino acids, beta-carotene, calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium, selenium, zinc, vitamins B-1, B-2, B-3 and C.



The root and the leaves contain mucilage, a mucus-like substance that does not dissolve in water (mostly composed of galacturonic acid, glucuronic acid, galactose, arabinose and rhamnose). The root contains 25 - 30 percent of this substance (the leaves - only 16%). Due to this substance the plant swells up and becomes slippery when wet. It gives the root an ability to soothe irritated tissue, particularly mucous membranes, and to loosen a cough.

Marshmallow root has the following properties:

- It is astringent - has a binding effect
- Diuretic - it increases the secretion and flow of urine
- Lithotriptic - dissolves urinary calculi (stones)
- Emollient - soothes inflamed tissue, softens and protects the skin
- Demulcent - soothes damaged or inflamed surfaces
- Mucilant - the herb protects mucous membranes and inflamed tissues
- Tonic - it nourishes and refresh the entire body
- Galactagogue - Marshmallow promotes the flow of milk in breast feeding mothers
- Laxative - it stimulates bowel movements
- Vulnerary - gives additional help in healing of wounds by protecting against infection and stimulating cell growth
- Nutritive - assists in the process of assimilating food and nourishes the body

It is an excellent demulcent and emollient; these properties make it useful in affecting inflammation and irritation of the mucous membranes, alimentary canal, and of the urinary and respiratory organs. Decoctions of the plant (especially of the root) are excellent in painful complaints of the urinary organs, exerting a relaxing effect upon the passages.

Single herbs that can be used in a variety of ways are called "polycrest herbs." Like many demulcent herbs, marshmallow is cooling and moistening, bringing relief to hot and dry conditions. Despite having the specificity of being a demulcent herb, marshmallow is a polycrest herb. It's been used for centuries in a broad range of ways.

Marshmallow works in complex ways. The herb is used in many lung preparations and cough syrups to alleviate a dry, hacking cough, whooping cough and laryngitis. It soothes the membranes, frequently preventing cough. It is used as a lubricating demulcent for the lungs and for the urinary tract, even though it never comes in direct contact with these surfaces.

Herbalist Jim McDonald explains: Though it makes sense that demulcents coat tissues, the physical mucilage is actually very poorly absorbed by the body, and certainly isn't traveling through the blood to the kidneys. Rather, the ingestion of mucilage seems to promote a systemic moistening of tissues throughout the body, with some demulcents being more specific to particular organ systems.

The use of marshmallow originated in traditional Greek medicine and later spread to Arabian and Indian Ayurvedic medicine. Long used as a healing and soothing herb, marshmallow was eaten by the Egyptians and Syrians and also mentioned by Pythagoras, Plato, and Virgil. The plant was enjoyed as a highly nutritious food by the Romans in barley soup and in stuffing for suckling pig, while classical herbalists praised its gentle laxative properties. It was used in Persia to reduce inflammation in teething babies, and the Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne (A.D. 800-814) insisted that it be planted throughout his kingdom. In the nineteenth century, some doctors made a meringue from the plant's root juices, egg whites and sugar that hardened into a medicinal candy that was used to soothe children's sore throats.

Because it contains salicylic acid (the natural forerunner of synthetic aspirin), marshmallow has been used to relieve the pain of headaches and muscle aches; it also helps to ease sore throat and sinusitis.

Marshmallow root is an old-time remedy for gastrointestinal disorders and strengthening the digestive system, because it contains polysaccharides that form a protective layer on the stomach lining and will lower stomach acids. The herb has frequently been used to ease ulcers, peptic ulcers, Crohn's disease, Irritable Bowel Syndrome and colitis.

As a diuretic, marshmallow root increases the flow of urine and rids the body of excess fluid. It has been used to improve kidney function, soothe the urinary tract and relieve cystitis and bladder infections.

Marshmallow improves the functioning of the immune system, since it is known to stimulate phagocytosis, the immune process in which cells called macrophages engulf and digest infectious microorganisms that attack healthy cells and cause serious disease.

Used externally, marshmallow root may be used in an ointment as an emollient to soften and soothe skin and dry hands. The mucilage forms a protective layer on damaged skin and helps to heal. Used internally and externally, the high mucilage content will also promote rapid healing of diaper rash, skin ulcers, sunburns, psoriasis, eczema and problem skin.

Found to be beneficial in research that involved people endorsed by Germany's Commission E for Therapeutic use: bronchitis, coughing, gastritis, intestinal inflammation, oral inflammation, and sore throat.

Found beneficial in research that did not involve people, the studies may have been done in a test tube, petri dish or on animals for therapeutic use: bruises, burns, chafing, chilblains, colds, colitis, crohn's disease, cystitis, dermatitis, diabetes, gallbladder problems, irritable bowel syndrome, kidney inflammation, respiratory problems, sores, sunburn, ulcers, and wounds.

Note: Not to be confused with mallow leaf and mallow flower. Not to be confused with confectionery marshmallows although confectionery marshmallows were once made from the *Althaea officinalis* plant, they now contain mostly sugar.

Based on animal study, marshmallow may lower blood glucose levels. Caution is advised for patients with diabetes or hypoglycemia, and in those taking drugs, herbs, or supplements that affect blood sugar.

Marshmallow root is considered safe for most people although it may inhibit the absorption of some pharmaceutical drugs and should be used several hours after taking medication.



Be sure to try NSP's Bowel Detox (120 caps), Para Cleanse (10 Day) or Intestinal Soothe & Build (100 caps).

References:

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<http://www.chinese-herbs.org/marshmallow-root>

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Yours in Good Health!

Sincerely,

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