

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi, Bearberry



Uva ursi is an evergreen shrub often referred to as bearberry because bears seem to enjoy eating the plant's red berries. The Latin name uva ursi literally translates to "bear's grapes."

Before the discovery of antibiotics, uva ursi was used as a natural remedy to treat urinary tract infections (UTIs).

This article covers the potential health benefits and side effects of taking uva ursi. You'll also learn the recommended doses and what to look for when buying this supplement.

Also Known As

- Bearberry
- Beargrape
- Rockberry
- Sandberry
- Kinnikinnick
- Arctostaphylos adentrica
- Arctostaphylos coactylis

What Is Uva Ursi Used For?

Herbal supplements made from the leaves of uva ursi have been used as a natural therapy to help treat cystitis (bladder infections) and UTIs.¹ The plants contain natural chemicals with infection-fighting properties, called glycosides and arbutin.

Glycosides might help reduce the bacteria in your urine. Your body transforms glycosides into hydroquinone, a compound with antibacterial properties.

Uva ursi also contains tannins, which can have an astringent (drying) effect on your tissues. Some people claim that the astringent effect can help fight infection by reducing inflammation. But more research is needed to confirm anti-inflammatory benefits.

Uva ursi has also been used topically (to the surface of the skin) because it chemically produces hydroquinone, which is a substance that is used in skin lightening creams. Hydroquinone is prescribed for the treatment of dark skin patches that develop due to skin damage.

Recap

Uva ursi has been used to treat UTIs and to lighten skin. It also may have anti-inflammatory and astringent activity.



Health Benefits

One research review examined 14 over-the-counter products to evaluate each one's ability to block urease, an enzyme that promotes infection from *Staphylococcus saprophyticus*, a common type of bacteria in the urinary tract.³

Only one of the 14 preparations in the study was able to significantly lower urease (by more than 75%). That preparation was uva ursi combined with green tea.

Another study found that "the antibacterial and astringent benefits [in uva ursi] plus research indicating that uva ursi can effectively treat and prevent urinary tract infections, suggest this herb can be helpful in treating urinary incontinence."

Uva ursi is also known for its diuretic properties—this refers to the body's ability to flush out fluids, which helps rid the bladder of disease-causing germs. *E. coli* is a type of bacteria that commonly causes UTIs in females. Research has suggested that uva ursi can help prevent *E. coli* as well.

Recap

There's some research suggesting uva ursi can prevent UTIs. But it's not currently recommended as an effective preventive supplement for long-term use.

Possible Side Effects

Uva ursi is considered relatively safe for adults taking low doses by mouth for a short period of time.

Potential side effects you may experience from short-term use are:⁵

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Upset stomach
- Greenish-brown urine
- Insomnia
- Irritability

However, you shouldn't take high doses of uva ursi or use it for a long period of time due to the potential for toxicity from hydroquinone.

Theoretically, high amounts of hydroquinone in the body can lead to serious, life-threatening complications:

- Liver damage
- Kidney damage
- Breathing difficulties
- Eye problems
- Seizures
- Death

You should not take uva ursi if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, and it should not be used in children.

This herb can also alter the absorption or effects of certain drugs and nutrients and should not be used if you:

- Take lithium
- Take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or corticosteroids
- Take iron supplements

Caution is recommended with uva ursi if you:

- Have any kidney disorders
- Have high blood pressure
- Have Crohn's disease, ulcers, or digestive problems
- Have liver disease
- Have thinning of the retina, which is the area in the back of the eye

Talk to your doctor first before taking uva ursi. Your doctor can help you determine if it's safe for you to take, or if you should steer clear



Dosage and Preparation

Uva ursi is sold in crushed leaf and powder preparations, including tea, tinctures, and capsules to take by mouth. Extracts of the plant are also used in products applied to the skin. Only the leaves are used—not the berries—in herbal medicinal preparations.

Due to the potential for toxicity, ask your doctor before taking uva ursi. Experts don't recommend taking the herb for more than two weeks. Some guidelines suggest taking uva ursi less than five times a year, and for not more than five days each time.

Never take more than the recommended dose or for longer than the prescribed duration.

- As a dried herb, a standard dose is 2 grams to 4 grams per day with a total of 400 milligrams (mg) to 800 mg of arbutin.⁶
- To make a tea, soak 3 grams of dried leaves in 5 ounces of water for 12 hours. Then strain the tea and drink it three to four times each day.

Avoid taking too much uva ursi. Even 15 grams (about a half-ounce) of dried uva ursi leaves can be toxic for some people.

Summary

Uva ursi is an herbal supplement that may be used to treat urinary tract infections and urinary incontinence, and to lighten the skin. There is limited research to support these uses, though.

Uva ursi can potentially have dangerous side effects, and it should be taken only for a short time. Always consult with your doctor before taking it. Pregnant or breastfeeding women and children should not use uva ursi.

