

Yucca gloriosa



Yucca is a perennial plant native to hot and dry regions of the Americas and the Caribbean with more than 40 known species. It is known for its sword-like leaves and whitish clusters of blossoms.

Yucca is used in gardens for ornamental purposes, but there are parts of the plant that are edible as well. Depending on the species, these may include the root, seeds,

blossoms, flowering stems, and the purplish yucca fruit.

Yucca root and bark has also long been used as traditional medicines in Native American cultures. The species most typically used for this purpose is *Yucca schidigera*, also known as Mojave yucca or Spanish dagger.

What Is Yucca Used For?

In alternative medicine, yucca is thought to stimulate circulation, improve digestion, reduce inflammation, and relieve pain. Herbalists contend that these properties can aid in the treatment of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, migraine, diabetes, eczema, arthritis, stomach problems, skin infections, and liver and gallbladder disorders.

The evidence supporting these claims is generally sparse. There are, however, a number of smaller studies that hint at some potential health benefits.

Arthritis

Yucca is rich in compounds called phenols which are known to exert an anti-inflammatory effect. Chief among them resveratrol and yuccaol which not only reduce inflammation but act as antioxidants, neutralizing free radicals that cause progressive harm to cells and tissues. These properties are believed to be beneficial to people with osteoarthritis .



A 2006 review of studies published in the Journal of Inflammation suggested that the phenols in yucca can reduce arthritis pain by

suppressing nitric oxide, a gas molecule that helps trigger the inflammatory response.

Most of the evidence in the review was based on lab studies. To date, the hypotheses have not been put to the test with human trials.



High Cholesterol

Yucca also contains plant-based chemicals known as steroidal saponins. Saponins are natural detergents that create foam; they are used to make soap and detergents.

When consumed, saponin binds with cholesterol and prevents its absorption in the intestines. Although a number of studies have shown that this can reduce cholesterol levels in the blood, the results have been variable.

According to 2003 trial from Korea, the daily consumption of *Yucca schidigera* and the herbal extract *Quillaja saponaria* decrease the total cholesterol and "bad" LDL cholesterol levels in people with hyperlipidemia (abnormally high blood fats).

The same results have not been replicated in other studies.

Heart Disease

In addition to lowering cholesterol, the regular consumption of yucca can help fight heart disease by reducing that oxidative stress (caused by the imbalance between free radicals and antioxidants) placed on the cardiovascular system. Free radicals often occur as a result of normal metabolic

processes. They damage cell walls, lipids, proteins, and DNA.

cause harm by damaging cells at the genetic level, accelerating many of the diseases associated with aging, including cancer and heart disease.



According to a 2003 study published in Nutrition, phenolic compounds found in yucca bark helped reduce oxidative stress by slowing the production of free radicals in platelets (the blood cells responsible for clotting).

This, in turn, reduces the excessive clumping of platelets, a key sign of chronic inflammation. According to the study's authors, these properties confer to a long-term reduction in the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Possible Side Effects

Yucca is considered safe when consumed as food. By contrast, the long-term safety of yucca supplements is unknown. Common side effects include nausea, stomach upset, vomiting, and a lingering bitter taste in the mouth.

Although yucca is sometimes used as a poultice or salve to treat minor skin injuries, it can cause irritation and allergy (including contact urticaria and contact dermatitis). Severe allergic reactions are rare but can occur.

It is unknown what, if any, drug interactions may occur if you take yucca. Because of its effect on platelets, it can potentially enhance the effects of antiplatelet drugs like Plavix

(clopidogrel). To avoid interactions, advise your healthcare provider if you are using or intend to use yucca for medical purposes.

Due to the lack of safety research, yucca supplements should not be used in children, pregnant women, or nursing mothers.

Dosage and Preparation

Readily found online or at natural health food stores, yucca supplements are available as capsules, powders, or extracts. Capsules typically come in 100-milligram formulations and are considered safe at this dose. There are also dried "wild-crafted" yucca root products that are used to make tea or extracts.

Despite its availability, there are no guidelines governing the appropriate use of yucca or yucca supplements. As a rule of thumb, do not exceed the recommended dose on the product label, and call your healthcare provider if you experience any side effects.

How do you use fresh yucca?

Preparing fresh yucca is tricky for several reasons. Firstly, the saponins in the root, while potentially able to lower your cholesterol, are actually quite toxic. In most cases, this will only cause indigestion since the human intestines don't absorb saponins all that well. (The same is not true for dogs and cat who can get seriously ill from eating yucca.)

Because you have no way of knowing how much saponin or polyphenols you're ingesting, it may be better to stick with storebought supplements that you can control.

At the same time, there are types of yucca that are inedible and potentially toxic. These include *Yucca aloifolia*, *Yucca treculeana*, or *Yucca gloriosa* as well as Buckley's yucca (*Yucca constricta*). Unless you can definitively identify the species in front of you, it is best to avoid eating it.