

ALOE VERA



Aloe barbadensis

[AL-oh bar-buh-DEN-s]

(syn *Aloe vera*)

Family: Asphodelaceae

Names: moka aloe, turkey, aloe, cape, Aloe Zanzibar, Barbados Aloe, lu hui, hsiang dan (Chinese); sink-am-bible (Creole)

Description: a squat succulent with a height of 1-5 feet and a width of 1-3 feet. The flowers are orange or red, grouped on top of tall, erect stems, hanging down like tiers of small 1-inch cigars. The leaves are fleshy, very succulent blades rising 1-2 feet from a rosette center. They are pale green and mottled with paler spots, prickly along the edges. It blooms midsummer when planted in the ground. Aloe takes 2-3 years to flower.

Cultivation: A perennial to Zone 3. Germination can sometimes take months. Space 3 feet apart with a soil temperature of 60F. Prefers sandy loam that is very well drained and a pH of 5-7.5. Infrequent, deep watering is needed so the roots don't get soggy.

Potted plants need filtered sun or complete shade. They turn brown when fully exposed to the sun. Easiest to propagate by rooting young, outer suckers.

History: An important herb for over 3,000 years, the Egyptian *Papyrus ebers* and temple walls describe the use of aloe vera to treat burns, skin ulcers and parasites. Aloe is thought to be the secret ingredient Cleopatra added to her beauty cream. The name goes back to the Arabic *alloe* or the Hebrew *halal*, meaning "bitter, shiny substance" describing the medicinal inner leaf of the plant. The Arabs first record using this bitter substance as a laxative in the 6th century B.C. In the 1st century A.D., the herbalist Dioscorides recommended aloe vera for digestive tract, kidney, mouth and skin diseases. The east African island of Socotra was the only place aloe was cultivated in the 4th century B.C., so Aristotle reportedly asked Alexander the Great to conquer the island to assure a constant supply. Socotra remained the only source of aloe vera until 1673 when English druggists began importing it from Barbados, giving it the species name *barbadensis*.

Cosmetically, aloe vera gel was valued by Cleopatra, who massaged it into her skin. Aloe was also reputed to be the basis of the Empress Josephine's complexion milk.

The active herb is derived from the condensed juice of the fresh leaves and comes in irregularly shaped chunks about 2 centimeters thick, with a waxy texture and varying in color from orange-brown to black. It is highly aromatic and has a sharply bitter taste, hence the Chinese name meaning "elephant's gall" (*hsiang dan*).

Constituents: Glycoside (anthraquinone, also called aloe-emodin and aloin), polysaccharides, acemannan (a powerful immunostimulant), saponins, essential oil, steroids, enzymes, antibiotic, minerals, cinnamic and salicylic acids. The fresh leaf contains about 96% water

Properties: purgative, promotes bile flow, heals wounds, tonic, demulcent, antifungal, stops bleeding, sedative, expels worms.

Energetics: leaves: bitter, hot, moist; gel: salty, bitter, cool, moist

Meridians/Organs affected: liver, stomach, large intestine

Medicinal Uses: Commercial aloe juice is made from the inner leaf, which is blended and strained, with a preservative added. To make aloe “gel”, the juice is thickened with seaweed to mimic the leaf’s original thick consistency. The crystalline part called aloin, a brownish gel found alongside the leaf blade, is powdered and used in some commercial laxatives. It is so strong that it must be combined with other herbs to prevent intestinal griping. The commercial juice and gel remove this part of the leaf, so both the juice and the gel are soothing to digestive tract irritations, such as peptic ulcers and colitis. In one study, the stomach lesions of twelve peptic ulcer patients were all completely healed. A popular ingredient in commercial drug store products, aloe is commonly used to soothe burns, including sunburn and radiation burns. Aloe is also applied to wounds, eczema, ringworm and poison oak and poison ivy rashes. There is evidence that it effectively regenerated injured nerves. One study reports aloe to be successful in healing leg ulcerations and severe acne and even finds that it promotes hair growth. When 56 frostbit patients were treated with a product containing 70% aloe, only 7% developed infections, compared to 98 frostbitten patients not treated with aloe, 33 of whom eventually needed amputation. It has also proved helpful in treating periodontosis. One study injected aloe extracts into the diseased areas of 128

patients with varying degrees of gum disease. Within a week, the development of symptoms stopped, pain decreased and marked improvement followed in all patients.

Aloe is widely used in folk medicine, both as a liniment and as a drink, to reduce the swelling and pain of arthritis and rheumatism. Diabetics in the Arabian peninsula eat aloe to control their blood sugar levels. A clinical study did find that when volunteers who were not insulin dependent took half a teaspoon daily for 4-14 weeks, their fasting blood sugar levels were reduced by half, with no change in body weight.

Another preparation from aloe, carrisyn, is a polysaccharide. It has been claimed that carrisyn directly kills various types of viruses, including herpes and measles, and possibly HIV. However, research is still in the preliminary stages.

To remove deeply embedded thorns, stones or fish scales, slice a piece of aloe vera leaf in half; apply over area and secure with a band or cloth. Leave this dressing on and change once daily—this will draw out the object in 3-5 days.

Remedies:

Gel: Apply the split leaf directly to burns, wounds, dry skin, fungal infections, and insect bites. Take up to 2 tsp in a glass of water or fruit juice, three times a day, as a tonic

Ointment: Split several leaves to collect a large quantity of gel, and boil it down to a thick paste. Store in clean jars in a cool place and use like the fresh leaves

Tonic Wine: Fermented aloe gel with honey and spices is known as *kumaryasava* in India and is used as a tonic for anemia, poor digestive function and liver disorders

Inhalation: Use the gel in a steam inhalant for bronchial congestion

Tincture of leaves: Use 1-3 ml per dose as an appetite stimulant or for constipation. The taste is unpleasant

Powder: Use 100-500 mg per dose or in capsules as a purgative for stubborn constipation and to stimulate bile flow.

Bunion Balsam: ¼ tsp aloe powder, 5/12 tsp myrrh powder, 4 oz vitamin E oil. Mix well in a bottle, let stand for a few days occasionally shaking the mixture, then strain off the clear liquid, discarding the sediment. Apply to bunions with a brush morning and night.

TCM: Using *A. Barbadensis*

Nature: bitter, cold

Affinity: liver, stomach, large intestine

Indications-Internal: stomachic, refrigerant; antiseptic; emmenagogue; sedative to liver, Chronic constipation; dizziness, headache and delirium due to live inflammations; intestinal parasites, gastritis, ulcers, indigestion, abdominal pains and heartburn; high or low blood pressure. Does not lose effect with prolonged use, so is good for chronic cases of constipation.

Indications-External: premature balding; scrapes, burns, sunburns, skin blemishes, and frostbite; athlete's foot; insect bites; acne; hemorrhoids.

Contraindications: children with empty-cold constitutions (very pale, frail, prone to respiratory disorders) should not use aloe; adults should not exceed the daily dosages suggested above

Veterinary Use: Topical application of aloe gel will usually bring immediate cooling relief to fleabites, poison ivy and sunburns. It is also excellent for reducing the itch and tightening of postsurgical incisions. Applied after sutures are removed, the gel reduces much of the irritation that so often leads to persistent chewing or scratching and may result in inflammation and infection. Apply enough juice to lightly cover the affected area and allow it to dry. Apply once or twice per day until the healing process is progressing well. Scientists have recently found that acemannan acts as a strong immunostimulant in animals, particularly in cats. It has been found to be especially effective in the treatment of fibrosarcoma and feline leukemia virus. In a recent study, 44 cats with confirmed FeLV were intravenously injected with 2 milligrams per kilogram of acemannan weekly for six

weeks and reexamined six weeks after the treatment was terminated. At the end of the 12 week study, 71 percent of the cats were alive and in good health. Acemannan has also been shown to be effective against cancerous tumors in rodents and dogs.

Flower Essence: For overuse or misuse of fiery, creative forces; "burned-out" feeling. Aloe Vera helps the soul and body aspect to come into greater harmony, by bringing the nourishment which comes from the water polarity of life—the flowing qualities of renewal and rejuvenation. When the soul learns to balance the fiery forces of the will with the fountain of feeling from the heart, a tremendous outpouring of positive creativity and spirituality can be realized.

Cosmetic Uses: Aloe is a popular base for many cosmetics. It is a soothing emollient for the skin that works wonders for complexion care, soothes sunburn and also prevents scarring. The aloin it contains is a sunscreen that blocks 20-30% of the sun's ultraviolet rays. Aloe's natural pH is about 4.3, ideally suited for skin, which is between pH 4 and 6.

Sunny Day Cream

1/8 cup lanolin

¼ cup almond oil

¼ cup coconut oil

¼ cup aloe vera gel

½ cup chamomile tea

¼ cup dried calendula petals

10-15 drops lavender essential oil

In the top of a double boiler or in a small saucepan over very low heat, melt the lanolin and almond oil together. Beat in the coconut oil with a wire whisk, then add the aloe vera gel and chamomile infusion, beating until the mixture is cool and creamy. Stir in the calendula petals and the lavender oil. Store cream in clean airtight jars in a cool, dark pantry or refrigerator for up to 6 months. (Herb Companion, May 2004)

Fungus Fighting Lotion

1 cup aloe vera gel

½ oz bloodroot tincture
1 tsp borax
½ tsp clove oil
½ tsp tea tree oil

Pour all ingredients into a blender. Blend for a few minutes, then pour into amber dropper bottles. Stored in a cool dark place, the lotion will last for up to one year. Shake the lotion well before using and apply two to three times daily. (Herbs for Health June 2004)

Toxicity: Excessive use of aloe (containing aloin) or any strong laxative, encourages hemorrhoids. This part of the plant should not be taken internally during pregnancy, since it can stimulate contractions, or while nursing, since it passes through breast milk

Ritual Uses: Aloe is sacred among many of the followers of Mohammed, particularly those living in Egypt. Pilgrims who visit Mohammed's shrine hang the aloe above the doorway. In that culture it is also believed that the aloe provides protection to one's home and the practice has spread to other religions in Egypt as well. The aloe is sometimes planted upon a burial site, believed to promote a peaceful existence until the deceased is reborn. Roman women believed that the plant was sacred to the goddess Venus, who bestowed love and beauty to those who gave her honor. Among some tribes living along the Congo River in Africa, the juice of the aloe is ritually gathered and is integrated into their hunting rituals. The practical aspect is that, when the hunter's body is coated with the juice of the aloe, he can move among his prey without his scent giving him away. Based upon lore and history, it would hold that growing an aloe would bring increased protection for your home. Modern lore has suggested that the aloe increases one's likelihood of finding success in the world. It also purports that aloe may help those afflicted with feelings of loneliness.

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Resources:

Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com plants

Crimson Sage, <http://www.crimson-sage.com> Plants

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