

The Amazing Medicine of the Yucca Plant



Historically, indigenous people have made use of the plants native to their own living area. For me, this fact has stood as good evidence of the natural interdependence of human and planet. Both our food and our medicine have always grown in our proverbial back yards and still do. What a wonderful design! On the Front Range, one plant that grows abundantly is our beautiful yucca cactus or *Yucca glauca*.

The root of the yucca has a long history as a folk remedy used for treatment of arthritis and rheumatism*. Native Americans used the sharp leaves as poultices or in baths for skin sores and sprains as well as to treat burns and abrasions. Inflammation of all sorts, including joint inflammations and bleeding were also treated with yucca root. Some report that Native Americans washed their hair with yucca root to fight dandruff and hair loss. They also used the black ashes of burnt yucca to make a paste that was smeared over the entire body to help break a fever.

The yucca root is rich in steroid-like saponins that elevate the body's production of cortisol, a natural anti-inflammatory, possibly explaining the herb's ability to aid in arthritic pains. Extracts from one species of yucca have been found to fight melanoma cells in test tube studies. The yucca also has moisturizing qualities and hair strengthening capabilities. Studies have shown that yucca extracts increase the moisture content of the skin by 22% and increase the smoothness of skin by 48%. A yucca extract evaluated on 10 individual strands of hair increased break strength by an average of 43% and elasticity by an average of 62%.

So as the weather begins to warm this spring, consider spending some time noticing our local plants, maybe even taking an herb walk with a local herbalist. It's a great way to strengthen our appreciation of our connection with the Earth.

* Although the yucca is generally a safe plant to use medicinally, it is always advisable to consult an expert herbalist regarding dosing and duration of treatment for plants you do not have experience with.