

Herb of the Month: Damiana

Damiana (*Turnera diffusa*) flourishes in hot, humid regions in Central America, South America, and Texas. This herb is a relatively small shrub that produces small, yellow, aromatic flowers. It blossoms in early to late summer and is followed by fruits that taste very similarly to figs. The shrub is said to have an odor somewhat like chamomile or *Cannabis sativa*, due to the essential oils present in the plant. The deep green leaves are harvested just after flowering in late summer.

The leaves are used medicinally today, and in the past by many native cultures, to treat a variety of disorders. It was introduced to the United States in 1874, and was used by Eclectic doctors at that time. The ancient Mayan civilization utilized Damiana leaf as a traditional aphrodisiac, and the people of Central America where the Mayan civilization was based utilize it to this day.

Damiana is a central nervous system tonic with benefits for the reproductive organs. It stimulates the production of the male hormone testosterone. It is often used by women for hormone balancing, hot flashes, infertility and menopause. Damiana is used for both frigidity in women and impotence in men. Thus it is used for lowered libido and/or depression. It is recommended for use when a person has unbalanced nervous anxiety. It may stimulate fertility by increasing sperm count in men and strengthening the ovum in women.

As an herbal tonic and possible aphrodisiac, Damiana is considered very valuable for its stimulatory action, as well for its reputation to restore sexual vitality to the body. Less known is its restorative tonic ability and its use to soothe and tone the nervous system. It is considered a warm and spicy herb, or in Chinese medicine a Yang tonic. Famed herbalist Rosemary Gladstar includes it in her list of favorite longevity herbs, claiming that this herb restores vitality, stimulates dreams and tones the nervous system.

In Mexico, it can be seen used as a substitute for tea leaves with its slightly bitter principle while it is also used as a flavoring agent for a variety of liqueurs. A mild sensation of euphoria is sometimes believed to be induced in a person using higher doses of Damiana. Consumption of the leaves is known to have a minor laxative effect, while the use of high doses of the leaves may cause the stools of the patient to loosen considerably.

Making a tea with the leaves is one of the best ways to enjoy this herb. The tea should be consumed 30 minutes before the effects will be experienced. To make a tea: take 1oz of Damiana leaf and pour 1 pint (16oz) of hot boiling water over the herb and steep for 10-15 minutes. Strain and add honey if desired. Up to three cups per day. Here at the Good Earth we have this herb in bulk and in liquid extract. Have fun!

