

Chaste Tree

Latin Name: *Vitex Agnus-Castus*

Also known as: Chasteberry, Vitex, Monk's Pepper

Scientific Classification

Vitex is a genus of about 270 species of shrubs and trees. Two other species demonstrate similar medicinal activity, *V. negundo* and *V. trifolia*.

Order: Lamiales
Family: Verbenaceae – verbena family
Genus: Vitex – chastetree
Species: *V. agnus-castus* – lilac chastetree

Influence on the Body	(PRINCIPLE ACTIONS are listed in CAPITAL LETTERS)
<i>Nervous System</i>	depression • anxiety • migraine
<i>Reproductive System</i>	<i>Male:</i> • impotence <i>Female:</i> • PMS • mastodynia (cyclic breast pain) • bloating • MENSTRUAL CYCLE irregularities • female infertility • inadequate milk secretion • promotes lactation • MENOPAUSE difficulties
<i>Skin, Tissues & Hair</i>	acne

Key Properties:

- HORMONE BALANCING
- GALACTAGOGUE – enhances lactation of nursing mothers

Primarily affecting: PITUITARY • REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

History	<p>In Greek mythology, the goddess Hera (champion of marriage and family) was said to have been born under the chaste tree. Young women celebrating the festival of Demeter (goddess of fertility) wore chasteberry blossoms to show they were remaining pure in honor of the goddess.</p> <p>The plant became a symbol of chastity through the ages and for a time was thought to counter sexual desire. A drink</p>
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prepared from the plant's seeds was used by the Romans to diminish libido, and monks in the Middle Ages used the fruit for similar purposes (yielding the common name "monk's pepper"). Despite the common use, there is no scientific evidence that chasteberry diminishes libido.

Chaste Tree has been used more effectively to treat female gynecological disorders. Hippocrates (460-377 BC) wrote of its use by women to stop afterbirth hemorrhaging and three centuries later, the Roman physician Pliny, wrote of its ability to normalize menstruation and increase lactation.

In the 1950s, the German pharmaceutical firm 'Madaus Company', first produced a standardized extract of the herb. Chaste Tree became a standard European treatment for the cyclical breast tenderness that is often associated with PMS and other symptoms of monthly irregularity. Chaste Tree continues to be one of the principal herbs to help normalize the balance of female hormones and support women's gynecological health.

Attributes

Key Components: (including, but not limited to)

Flavonoids (contributes to the effectiveness of the herb)

Chaste Tree has pain-relieving and relaxant properties, but it is best known for its hormone-balancing effects. It is commonly used for lactation support and to overcome pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) and menstrual irregularities.

Lactation

Herbalists have recommended chaste tree as an effective galactagogue (increases the flow of breast milk) for nearly 2,000 years.

Menstrual Irregularity

Scientists have not found any hormone-like components in chaste tree. It appears to act on the pituitary gland to lower abnormal release of prolactin. High levels of the hormone prolactin in non-pregnant women may cause cyclic breast tenderness and other PMS symptoms and ultimately result in an imbalance and irregularity in the female hormone cycle. Chasteberry is often used for irregular or absent menstrual flow.

In a study of 52 women with irregular menstruation, 'significant improvements' were shown after three months of using chasteberry as a supplement.

<p><i>PMS</i></p>	<p>German health authorities allow chaste tree preparations for pressure and swelling in the breasts, heavy or too-frequent periods, acyclic bleeding, infertility, suppressed menses, and PMS (premenstrual syndrome).</p> <p>In two studies enrolling about 3,000 women, doctors rated chasteberry as being 90 percent effective in showing significant or complete improvement in symptoms such as breast pain, fluid retention, headache, and fatigue.</p> <p>Another study of 175 women found marked reduction of PMS symptoms including breast tenderness, edema, tension, headache, constipation, and depression. It was found useful in 80 percent of the women and results were rated by practitioners as being excellent in over 24 percent of the cases.</p>
<p><i>Other</i></p>	<p>Chaste Tree has been shown to be effective for helping women ease off birth control pills.</p> <p>In Germany chaste tree has had good results in reducing certain kinds of teenage acne (it was less effective for those having a strong family history of severe acne with continuous break out).</p>
<p>Herb Parts Used</p>	<p>Ripe fruits gathered in the autumn</p>
<p>Preparations and Remedies</p>	<p>Chasteberry products are found in a liquid tincture form, or when powdered, capsules and tablets are effective. Teas are seldom used.</p> <p><i>Fresh:</i> The berries may be taken fresh one after another, held in the mouth, slowly crunched, and then consumed.</p> <p><i>Powdered</i> The berries must be crushed or milled to a coarse powder before adding the menstruum (liquid of choice), then macerated (soaked to soften and release constituents).</p>
<p>Safety</p>	<p>Widespread use in Germany has not led to any reports of significant adverse effects. Because it lowers prolactin levels, chaste tree berries are not recommended by many during pregnancy.</p>
<p>Plant Profile</p>	<p><i>Natural Habitat:</i> Chaste Tree is commonly found along riverbanks and nearby foothills in central Asia and around the Mediterranean Sea. It is naturalized in much of the southeastern United States. The fruits are grown commercially in Europe. It thrives in</p>

most types of soil, is drought tolerant, and may be grown from seed or cuttings.

Description

Chaste tree is a large shrub or small tree (growing 3-18 feet) that is cultivated as an ornamental and medicinal plant.

Its abundant lavender (occasionally purple, mauve or pink) flowers cluster on spikes in the height of the summer. The plant has dull-green, palm-like leaves that are lighter on the under side. There are up to nine leaflets radiating from each leaf stalk. The flowers and leaves exude an exotic pepper-like aroma and flavor.

After its flowers have bloomed, a dark reddish black peppercorn-like fruit grows to less than a quarter of an inch long. It can be harvested in the autumn at full maturity and dried for herbal use.
