

Brigham Tea

Latin Name: *Ephedra viridis*

Also known as: Ephedra, American Ephedra, Mormon Tea, Miner's Tea, Desert Tea, Squaw Tea, Joint Fir, Yellow River, General of Respiration

Scientific Classification

There are approximately 40 species of ephedra, each with similar *and* unique characteristics of varying potency.

Family: Ephedraceae – Mormon-tea family
Genus: Ephedra – Joint fir
Species: *E. viridis* – Mormon tea
Species: *E. nevadensis* – also known as Mormon tea

Not to be confused with:

Species: *E. sinica* – Chinese ephedra, also called Ma Huang
E. sinica is currently FDA regulated because of reported health risks associated with the abuse of products that contained the isolated, extracted and synthesized alkaloid 'ephedrine' (naturally found in abundance in this herb, and in lesser amounts in Brigham Tea).

Influence on the Body	(PRINCIPAL ACTIONS are listed in CAPITAL LETTERS)
<i>Blood and Circulatory System</i>	vasoconstrictor (narrows blood-vessel openings, restricting the flow of blood through them)
<i>Infections and Immune System</i>	allergies • malarial fevers • myasthenia gravis (disease characterized by the wasting of muscles, particularly those associated with swallowing) • hay fever
<i>Lungs and Respiratory Tract</i>	EXPECTORANT • BRONCHIAL ASTHMA • emphysema (painful condition in which air spaces in the lungs are enlarged)
<i>Nervous System</i>	epilepsy • depression • NERVINE STIMULANT
<i>Weight</i>	weight loss • increased metabolism

Key Properties:

- STIMULANT – increases internal heat, dispels internal chill and strengthens metabolism and circulation
- BRONCHIAL DIALATION
- EXPECTORANT – loosens and removes phlegm in the respiratory tract
- astrigent – tightens tissues and decreases swelling
- diuretic – increases urine flow

Primarily affecting: CIRCULATION • LUNGS • HEART

History

Ephedra *viridis* (Brigham Tea) is a relative to the powerful, medicinal Chinese plant, Ephedra *sinica*. Both Ephedra plants have similar active components. Though Brigham Tea has considerably less quantities of the active component 'ephedrine', it makes an effective substitute for Ma Huang and along with the other elements it contains, is an excellent herb in its own right.

Ma Huang (E. sinica)

Ma Huang is highly regarded in Chinese herbology where it has been used effectively and safely for over 5,000 years to treat colds, coughs, fevers (including malaria), headaches and skin eruptions.

The *Divine Husbandman's Classic of Materia Medica*, 220 BC, is the first known record concerning the medicinal uses of herbs. Written by the Chinese, it records the use of Ma Huang as being a part of Chinese medicine.

In recent years, scientists have extracted the stimulant alkaloid 'ephedrine' from the herb Ma Huang and chemically produced it as 'epinephrine' (synthetic adrenalin). When chemically produced in this way, the resulting drug can be dangerous to some individuals when taken in excess or combined with synthetic caffeine. This result became apparent when weight-loss products that contained these synthesized compounds in a laboratory were promoted and became popular in the United States and European countries.

Major health threats became associated with synthetic ephedrine use, including hypertension (high blood pressure), tachycardia, CNS (central nervous system) excitation, arrhythmia, myocardial infarction (heart attack), stroke and death.

FDA Ruling

On February 11, 2004, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a final ruling that prohibited the sale of dietary supplements with ephedrine alkaloids (ephedra) because they believed such supplements presented an unreasonable risk of illness or injury.

The shame of this whole thing is that the FDA grouped natural Ma Huang in with the laboratory-created chemical called ephedrine and made both illegal in the USA.

In five thousand years of whole plant use, not one negative side effect has been reported. When the whole plant is used, all of the chemical constituents are present, including those that balance out the active constituents. When one alkaloid is singled out and extracted, it becomes a powerful pharmaceutical that is unsafe for individuals with high blood pressure or heart problems.

Brigham Tea
(*E. viridis*)

There are several American ephedra species that contain little or no ephedrine and are *not* banned by the FDA. Brigham Tea contains less ephedrine than its Asian cousin, Ma Huang.

The Native American Navajo tribe are said to have brewed the tops of the Brigham Tea plant for cough medicine. Other tribes roasted the seeds and ate them whole or ground them into a meal. The Hopi used the plant to treat syphilis. The Paiute and Shoshones steeped tea made from the twigs to normalize kidney and bladder disorders. The Kawaiisu (from what is now California) used the tea for backaches. Today, it is still valued by many tribes as a tonic beverage and blood purifier.

The friendly Native Americans taught the pioneers how to use Brigham Tea. The herb grew abundantly in the Uinta Basin (Utah and surrounding areas), and the coarse green shrub became nicknamed 'Brigham Tea' or sometimes 'Mormon tea' because Brigham Young, a prophet of the Mormon pioneers, drank it often and recommended it for the health and vitality of his parishioners.

As long as I can remember, my Mother and Grandmother drank Brigham Tea. They always fed it to us children when we were sick and told us it was 'good for us.' My Mom always talked about it being a blood purifier. She taught me

how to wild-craft it and how to store it in a brown paper bag so it didn't mold. We would gather large boxes of it at a time so that it would last us all year long. Mom would fill her coffeemaker with the whole herb, run hot water on it, and let it steep for 30 minutes. Then she would add honey and drink it hot or put it in the refrigerator for a nice cool drink later. Mom reused the same herb until the water ran clear, then threw the used herb into the compost pile. Thanks Mom, for teaching me about this wholesome herb!

<p>Attributes</p>	<p><u>Key Components:</u> (including, but not limited to)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Phosphorus</u> • <u>Ephedrine</u> • <u>Pseudo-ephedrine</u> • <u>Resin</u> • <u>Tannins</u>
<p><i>Opens Bronchioles and Blood Vessels</i></p>	<p><i>Ephedrine:</i> The ephedrine component found in Brigham Tea accounts for much of its therapeutic action. To a lesser degree, ephedrine acts similarly to adrenalin. Brigham Tea has a milder action on the body than does adrenalin, but it lasts longer in the blood.</p> <p>Brigham Tea stimulates the heart muscles, thereby constricting blood vessels, increasing circulation and normalizing blood pressure. This forces more blood to the extremities (head, arms, hands, legs and feet), provides a stimulant action on the brain and nerve centers, and reduces fatigue and weariness.</p> <p>It is recommended by some that this herb should be avoided by those who are hypertensive and have a history of increased blood pressure.</p>
<p><i>Respiration and Chest Congestion</i></p>	<p>Brigham Tea stimulates and increases the depth of respiration. Ephedrine is a bronchio-dilator (relaxes and opens the bronchioles) and has been a life-saving herb in extreme cases of chronic asthma.</p> <p>Ephedrine reinforces heart action and dilates the bronchi, especially during spasms – which is why it is used for bronchial asthma. It can relax and relieve muscle spasms in the bronchial tubes.</p> <p>Ephedra acts as a decongestant and expectorant (loosens and removes phlegm) for relieving respiratory congestion. It has also been useful for acute sinusitis and hay fever.</p>
<p><i>Central Nervous System</i></p>	<p>Ephedrine stimulates the central nervous system and is an energy tonic that strengthens and restores body vitality. It</p>

	<p>acts to stimulate the body and calm the mind, making it excellent for increasing mental energy during a long test or meditation. It has also been used effectively as a treatment for depression and narcolepsy (a chronic sleep disorder). Brigham Tea can cause sleeplessness if taken before bedtime.</p>
<i>Weight</i>	Brigham Tea's ability to increase metabolism and 'warm' the body gives it some weight loss benefits. The safest way to enjoy the benefits of Brigham Tea is to prepare it using the whole herb.
<i>Diuretic</i>	<p><i>Pseudoephedrine:</i> Pseudoephedrine has a similar, but weaker adrenalin effect than that of ephedrine, yet it has a stronger diuretic effect (increases urine flow). Brigham Tea also has astringent properties that can reduce swelling.</p>
<i>Allergic Reactions and Poisons</i>	Brigham Tea can reduce the allergic response in a wide range of conditions, including bee stings. It has been used as a treatment for snake bites.
Herb Parts Used	The whole plant has been used medicinally
Preparations and Remedies	All parts of the plant may be used to make teas, infusions, decoctions and tinctures; or the herb can be dried, powdered and put into capsules.
<i>Infusion</i>	<p><i>Brigham Tea:</i> It is most commonly used as a pleasant beverage. Steep for five to fifteen minutes. The plant is greenish gray but produces a beautiful light pink liquid when made into a tea.</p>
Safety	<p>Ephedra can increase nervousness and restlessness in some people and is contraindicated in certain cases of heart problems and high blood pressure.</p> <p>It should be noted that plants of the Ephedra family have been used medicinally for thousands of years. There have been no reported undesirable side effects when the entire herb is used in its natural state.</p>
Plant Profile	<p><i>Natural Habitat:</i> Mormon tea ephedra (Brigham Tea) is native to the American Southwest. It is found in arid areas of the Northern Hemisphere, especially in the southwest deserts. Ma Huang ephedra (E. sinica) is indigenous to China, South Siberia and Japan.</p>

Description

The vivid green foliage of the Brigham Tea plant presents a striking contrast to an often gray desert environment. This perennial shrub is broom-like with jointed green stems and branches that grow two to four feet long. Two or three scale-like leaves grow at the joints in the stems and branches. Male and female cones appear on separate plants; the male cones have yellow pollen sacs.

The plant prefers full sun and very fast draining soil. It remains hardy to 10° F. To plant, scarify lightly and sow seeds in warm, fast-draining mix. Individuate the plants and grow out in pots for a year or two before transplanting to landscape soil.

Harvesting

It is best to harvest Brigham Tea in the fall to winter after the new growth has subsided. The coloring of the plant will change to an olive greenish gray. Harvesting Brigham Tea too early in the season causes an odd tasting tea, somewhat like when you have eaten an unripe banana.