

Slippery Elm

Latin Name: *Ulmus rubra*

Also known as: Indian Elm, Red Elm, Rock Elm, Moose Elm, Elm Bark, Sweet Elm, Winged Elm, Gray Elm

Scientific Classification

There are about 20 species belonging to the elm family.

Slippery (or Red) Elm is smaller than the rest of the elm family. California Slippery Elm (*Fremontia californica*) is not botanically allied to *Ulmus rubra*, but its bark is said to have the same properties and may be used for similar medicinal purposes.

Family: Ulmaceae – elm family
Genus: Ulmus – elm
Species: *U. rubra* – slippery elm
Species: *U. fulva* – synonymous classification: the species name
U. rubra was made and published just prior to *U. fulva* and is technically more correct. Herbalists have used both nomenclature systems.

Influence on the Body	(PRINCIPAL ACTIONS are listed in CAPITAL LETTERS)
<i>Addictions</i>	smoking
<i>Blood & Circulation</i>	hemorrhage
<i>Blood Sugar</i>	diabetes
<i>Body System</i>	odorous perspiration • mucous membranes • DEMULCENT (softens and soothes inflammation of mucous membranes) • removes mucus • mild astringent (tightens and constricts tissues, reduces swelling)
<i>Cancer</i>	cancer • tumors
<i>Digestive Tract</i>	NUTRITIVE TONIC (supplies nutrients, aids in building and toning, and increases energy and strength throughout the body) • hiatal hernia • nutrition (good source of nutrients and sustenance) • weak and debilitated nutrition • DIGESTIVE DISORDERS • gas • stomach problems • stomach acidity • ULCERS • COLITIS • COLON • DIARRHEA • CONSTIPATION • dysentery (bowel inflammation) • diverticulitis (bowel wall 'out-pouch' inflammation) • hemorrhoids • expels worms • appendicitis
<i>Endocrine System</i>	adrenal glands

<i>Eyes</i>	eyes • purulent ophthalmia (eye inflammation with discharge)
<i>First Aid</i>	BURNS • sores • fractures • wounds • gangrenous wounds • vulnerary (promotes healing of wounds by protecting from infection and stimulating cellular growth) • poison ivy rash
<i>Infections and Immune System</i>	hay fever • fevers • flu • herpes • CATARRHAL INFECTIONS • COUGHS • whooping cough (also known as pertussis, a contagious disease characterized by severe coughing and 'whooping' sound when breathing in)
<i>Inflammation</i>	internal inflammation • gout • arthritis • painful joints
<i>Liver</i>	jaundice
<i>Lungs and Respiratory System</i>	PECTORAL (healing to problems in the bronchio-pulmonary area) • ASTHMA • BRONCHITIS • LUNGS • phlegm • expectorant (loosens and removes phlegm in the respiratory tract) • croup (inflammation of larynx, accompanied by cough, difficult breathing and fever) • pneumonia • tuberculosis • lung hemorrhaging • pleurisy (painful inflammation of chest cavity lining) • diphtheria (contagious disease characterized by difficult breathing)
<i>Mouth, Nose & Throat</i>	hoarseness • sore throat • tonsillitis
<i>Pain</i>	pain • lumbago (back pain)
<i>Reproductive System</i>	libido • venereal disease • syphilis <i>Female:</i> • ovaries • uterus • cramps • female problems • vaginal discharge • douche • leucorrhea (vaginal discharge due to infection)
<i>Skin, Tissues & Hair</i>	EMOLLIENT (softens and soothes skin externally, and mucous membranes when taken internally) • ABSCESSSES • boils • warts • ulcerous sores • chafed skin • rashes • DIAPER RASH • eczema • skin diseases
<i>Urinary Tract</i>	urinary tract infections • kidney disorders • water retention • diuretic (increases urine flow) • cystitis (bladder inflammation) • bladder problems

Key Properties:

• MUCILAGE DEMULGENT and EMOLLIENT – protects, soothes, softens, and heals inflamed mucous membranes, particularly of the skin and digestive, respiratory and urinary systems

- NUTRITIVE – supplies nourishment, soothes digestion, assists nutrient assimilation, restores strength and tone to the body
- mild astringent – increases tissue tone and firmness, reduces mucous discharge from the nose, intestines, and draining sores, etc.

**Primarily affecting: MUCOUS MEMBRANES • STOMACH
• RESPIRATORY TRACT • URINARY TRACT**

History

The species name 'rubra' means red and refers to the rust color of the tree's buds before the leaves appear in the spring.

Native Americans ate the nourishing inner bark and made a soothing laxative tea. They called it 'oohooska' meaning 'it slips.' The Osage found the inner bark made an effective poultice for healing wounds and extracting thorns and gunshot. Among the Cree tribe, a poultice of the bark was a toothache remedy.

Early American settlers learned to soak the bark in water and apply it to wounds as a natural bandage. Slippery Elm was used by colonists to make pudding, thicken jelly, preserve grease, and as a survival food on long trips.

George Washington's army endured the bitter winter at Valley Forge (1777-78) by eating porridge made from the inner bark of the slippery elm tree. Army doctors used it as a primary treatment for gunshot wounds. Later, when food was scarce during the War of 1812, British soldiers fed their horses slippery elm bark.

Skin washes and teas were made using dried elm leaves. The inner bark was used to waterproof canoes, baskets, and places of living. Physicians In the 19th century recommended slippery elm bark be taken as a nourishing broth for children, the elderly, wasting diseases, and convalescing invalids who had difficulty digesting food.

The bark was recommended as a reliable remedy for gastrointestinal disorders (stomach aches, ulcers, gastritis, colitis, diarrhea, dysentery, and intestinal worms), respiratory afflictions (sore throats, coughs, pneumonia, consumption, and pleurisy), injuries, and skin ailments.

Slippery Elm throat lozenges made by the Henry Thayer Company have kept the herb on drugstore shelves for over a century. Thayer's Slippery Elm Lozenges first appeared

sometime in the late 1800's. Slippery Elm bark continues to be used today, much in the same way as in the past.

Attributes

Key Components: (including, but not limited to)

Nutrients

Bioflavonoids • Vitamins E • K • Calcium (good source)
• Copper • Iron • Phosphorous • Potassium • Selenium
• Sodium • Zinc

Linoleic acid • Mucilage (soft and slippery sugar molecules)

When the inner bark of the slippery elm gets wet, gummy substances surrounding its fibers swell and produce a slippery, gel-like compound called mucilage.

Nutritive

Slippery Elm is recognized as a mild-flavored, wholesome and nutritious food that is safe enough for babies and recovering convalescents. It is an excellent sustaining food possessing as much nutrition as oatmeal, though it is much easier to digest. Slippery Elm helps to nourish the adrenal glands which gently stimulate and energize the entire body.

Slippery Elm helps the body break down dairy products and is indicated whenever there is difficulty in digesting or holding down foods. The gruel made with slippery elm bark is a valuable remedy in cases of malnutrition, weakness, stomach inflammation, pulmonary complaints, lung hemorrhage, etc.

Mucous Membranes

Slippery Elm has a wonderfully soothing, healing and strengthening action on inflamed mucous membranes and irritated tissues. Its abundant mucilage naturally coats, softens hardened tissues, draws out impurities, absorbs poisons, and buffers inflammation.

Names of disorders ending in '-itis' indicate an inflamed and irritated condition. Slippery Elm is used for its abilities to rapidly heal and relieve discomfort in conditions such as bronchitis, colitis, cystitis, arthritis, tendinitis, prostatitis, and conjunctivitis.

Digestive Tract

This versatile herb provides nutrition and a soothing coat to the digestive tract. Slippery Elm is a great friend to the stomach, small intestine and colon. It has the ability to protect sore throats, help neutralize stomach acidity, absorb foul gases, heal damaged tissues, speed digestion, and enhance beneficial bacteria growth.

Slippery Elm acts as a deterrent to many toxic substances through its ability to absorb and pass toxins harmlessly out of the body. It lubricates the bowel, allowing for smooth and softer eliminations; by taking a large dose of the tea, parasites literally slide out of the digestive tract.

Slippery Elm works as a 'contact healer', as well as by way of digestion. For sore throats and hiatal hernias, slippery elm is best consumed either in tea form or by stirring the powder in water, juice, or applesauce. Once swallowed, slippery elm is able to directly contact the surfaces above the stomach and begin its healing action.

Taking a heaping teaspoon of slippery elm powder every two to five hours can soothe the worst digestive inflammation of nervous diarrhea or soften and lubricate areas of constipation. It may be taken by mouth or used as an enema to normalize stools and soothe, protect, and heal the entire intestinal tract inner lining.

Slippery Elm bark powder is a good addition to douches and enemas when inflammation and burning are present. When it is used this way, it needs to be diluted with enough water so as not to plug the orifice as it swells. Slippery Elm is also an excellent remedy for irritated kidneys and the mucous membranes of the urinary and respiratory tract.

*Lungs and
Respiratory Tract*

Slippery Elm tea and lozenges are great for coughs, sore throats, bronchitis, lung diseases, and lung hemorrhaging.

Skin

Slippery Elm acts on the skin and tissues to relieve painful inflammation, draw out impurities, soothe, smooth, soften, speed healing, and strengthen tissues.

Slippery Elm bark may be applied as a poultice or a fomentation to inflamed surfaces, rashes, chafed skin, ulcerous sores, wounds, burns, boils, skin diseases, and even purulent ophthalmia. It also makes a wonderful topical application for deeper inflammations such as gout, arthritis and painful joints.

Antioxidant

Antioxidants found in slippery elm bolster the immune system and reduce inflammation. Slippery Elm is one of four ingredients in Essiac Tea - used for stimulating the immune system and helping the body fight cancer (see recipe in BURDOCK preparations section).

<i>Other Uses</i>	Slippery Elm's mucilage gives it the ability to bind together herbal preparations such as suppositories, boluses, and lozenges. Poultices made with leaves of other herbs are frequently combined with slippery elm to give the combination cohesiveness.
Herb Parts Used	Inner bark, fresh or dried
Preparations and Remedies	<p><i>Fresh:</i> The inner bark may be chewed and the fluid swallowed for irritation of the throat.</p> <p><i>Powder</i> The powder should be gray or fawn colored. If powder is dark or reddish, good results may not be obtained. It has a bland flavor that hints of burnt caramel candy. Most babies willingly eat slippery elm mixtures. It may be added to juices or apple sauce. Lukewarm liquid activates the mucilage immediately.</p> <p><i>Tooth Powder:</i> A pinch of the powder placed in the tooth where decay has started is said to reduce discomfort and delay further decay.</p> <p><i>Infusions</i> Slippery Elm is mucilaginous and expands when mixed with water. It should be taken with lots of water. The powder mixes easily with plenty of liquid. You may also use a blender, wire whip, fork, or shake it in a bottle vigorously until well blended.</p> <p><i>Mild:</i> Pour one cup hot water over one teaspoon powdered bark and steep for one hour or overnight. Infusions may be simmered, strained and then consumed, giving a thick syrup consistency.</p> <p><i>Medium:</i> Pour one cup hot water over one tablespoon powdered bark.</p> <p><i>Strong:</i> Pour one cup hot water over two to four (or more) tablespoons of the powdered bark, stirring constantly. It will make a thick, slimy, healing, brown sludge.</p> <p><i>Essiac Tea:</i> (see BURDOCK preparations)</p> <p><i>Red Raspberry Tea:</i> (see RED RASPBERRY preparations)</p> <p><i>Urinary Tract Infection Tea:</i> (see UVA URSI preparations)</p>

<p><i>Wash / Fomentations</i></p>	<p><i>Athlete's Foot Soak:</i> (see CHAPARRAL preparations)</p> <p><i>Soothing Fomentation:</i> (see LOBELIA preparations)</p>
<p><i>Slippery Elm Gruel</i></p>	<p>Mix one teaspoon slippery elm powder and one teaspoon honey or maple syrup into one pint of hot water, stirring to eliminate lumps. Flavor with lemon rind, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg or other spices.</p> <p><i>Alternative:</i> Ginger is a good addition because it significantly increases the focus and action of slippery elm. Use a fourth- or half-part ginger for each one part slippery elm. Individuals that cannot keep anything down are often able to tolerate slippery elm gruel when taken a teaspoonful at a time.</p> <p><i>Extended Internal Use:</i> It may be necessary to use the soothing, healing effects of slippery elm bark for an extended period of time in cases of prolonged, severe colitis or surgery. Some practitioners recommend that a day's break be taken once a week from continuous slippery elm use (or mix slippery elm with other herbs such as ginger) to ensure against a non-stop coating of the intestines.</p>
<p><i>Enema</i></p>	<p>Use mild infusion as an enema for diarrhea and nausea.</p> <p><i>Enema/Douche:</i> (see RED RASPBERRY preparations)</p>
<p><i>Bolus</i></p>	<p><i>Bolus:</i> (vaginal or rectal suppository) Hold inside for a day, wash out with douche, and repeat if necessary. A bolus is an excellent treatment for uterine problems, cancer and tumors of the womb, all growths in the female organs, fallen womb, leucorrhea, or inflammation and congestion of any part of the vagina or womb.</p>
<p><i>Poultices</i></p>	<p>Soak the inner bark in water (warm water works the quickest) until a gel substance forms, and apply directly to the area of concern. Always clean and flush open wounds with an anti-infection tincture before applying a poultice. Use slippery elm alone, or mix with other herbs, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goldenseal root, to disinfect Cayenne (in small amounts), to stop bleeding Plantain Echinacea, for bites, stings and blood poisoning Aloe vera gel, to promote healing Tea tree oil

Kelp
Powdered Myrrh gum
Black Walnut inner hulls
(the inner goo just inside the outer shell)

Make slippery elm inner bark at least a third of the poultice mixture. Blend all the herbs by hand or in a blender. Add enough hot water to make a gummy consistency and apply to the affected area.

In simple inflammations, the poultice may be applied directly onto the affliction. If the area has hair, smear the face of the poultice with olive oil or fold it within a piece of clean unbleached muslin before applying.

For abscesses and open wounds, poultice ingredients should be placed between cloths. Always use clean muslin (cotton) and change often if drainage occurs. When covering a deep wound or cut, the poultice may stay in place for three or four days. Adding a layer or two of cotton gauze over the poultice and pressing will make a secure cast.

While acting as a binding agent, slippery elm will help draw out poisons, soothe the skin, and reduce inflammation. It is excellent for abscesses, burns, skin inflammation, congestion, eruptions, enlarged prostate, swollen glands of the neck and groin, severe rheumatic problems, gout, and other joint problems. Slippery Elm inner bark works so well that once it dries, it may take some effort to remove it.

Boils and Abscess Poultice: (see ECHINACEA preparations)

Poultice for Burns: (see FLAXSEED preparations)

Cough Syrups

Slippery Elm makes a great cough syrup when used either alone or as a base for other herbs. It helps to soften and expel mucus and relieve inflammation.

Slippery Elm Cough Syrup:

Make the syrup fresh when it is needed, or it may be stored in the refrigerator for a few weeks. After that time, it is best to start with a fresh batch to ensure potency.

In a saucepan, mix a quarter cup slippery elm powder with one cup water. Simmer and stir gently for twenty minutes. Let cool and add two tablespoons each of raw honey and fresh squeezed lemon juice (raw apple cider vinegar can be used if lemon is not available). It is difficult and unnecessary

	<p>to strain out the used herb powder.</p> <p><i>Option 1:</i> Substitute part of the slippery elm for other herbs such as comfrey, chopped raw onion, ginger, or clove. Cayenne may be used in small quantities as well.</p> <p><i>Option 2:</i> Add a few drops of an essential oil to supplement the healing action and taste of the syrup. Peppermint oil is refreshing, and clove oil would be a fine choice for its antiseptic and pain-numbing qualities.</p> <p>For children up to about six years old, most syrups should be taken one teaspoon at a time, every two hours, or as needed. For older children and adults, one tablespoon per dose may be taken as needed.</p>
<i>Salve</i>	<i>Lobelia Salve:</i> (see LOBELIA preparations)
Safety	<p>No health hazards or adverse side effects are known.</p> <p>Slippery Elm is approved by the Federal Drug Administration as an over-the-counter ingredient in throat lozenges.</p>
Plant Profile	<p><i>Natural Habitat:</i> Elm trees are native to the Appalachian Mountains of eastern North America, and in Asia. They grow in the moist (though not waterlogged) woods of eastern Canada and United States.</p>
<i>Description</i>	<p>Slippery Elm grows 50-60 feet high with a trunk 1-4 feet in diameter. The reddish-brown bark is very rough and scaly and has deep perpendicular furrows. Young branches are red-brown to orange and more-or-less downy. The twigs are rough, grayish, and hairy. The under layers are ruddy brown, and the innermost layer, next to the wood, is buff white, aromatic, and very mucilaginous. It is this inner layer that is used medicinally. Small flowers appear (before the leaves) in clusters at the extremities of young shoots in March and April.</p> <p>Its large leaves (four to eight inches long, two to three inches broad) are sandpaper-rough on both sides. They have a deep olive-green color above, and a lighter, sometimes rusty, color beneath. Leaf color darkens in the fall. The leaves have double-serrated margins and are noticeably asymmetrical at the base.</p> <p>The fruit ripens in early summer every two to four years. It</p>

encircles a single, flat brown seed. The thin, green, membranous capsule makes a flat circular wing that flies away on the spring wind. In the wild, only a few seeds are fertile.

Slippery Elm Growth

Slippery Elm grows in moist soils in full or partial sun. It seems to be less susceptible than other species to Dutch Elm Disease, which devastated other elm populations when it spread to the United States in the 1930's.

Harvesting

In the spring, the herb is collected from wild trees. To be effective, the tree must be at least ten years old. It should be gray in color, not red. The rough outer bark is removed and the inner bark retained and dried. The wood does not have commercial value and is left. When harvested commercially, the tree is fully stripped and consequently dies.

So much bark was harvested at one time, that slippery elm became a threatened species. In an 1837 study conducted for the state of Massachusetts, George B. Emerson wrote, 'In many places I have found it dead or dying, from having been stripped of its bark. . . It is much to be regretted that the slippery elm has become so rare.'

Responsible harvesting and re-population is essential to maintaining an adequate supply of herbs. It would have been a shame indeed to have lost the benefits of this marvelous plant.