

# Wild Yam

Latin Name: *Dioscorea villosa*

*Also known as:* Mexican Wild Yam, Colic Root, Rheumatism Root, Liver Root, China Root, Yuma, Devil's Bones

## Scientific Classification

Yams are herbaceous vines whose stems twine consistently to the right or left, depending on the species. Of the approximate 800 known species, 4 are native to the United States and Canada.

*Family:* Dioscoreaceae – yam family  
*Genus:* Dioscorea – yam  
*Species:* *D. villosa* – wild yam

Influence on the Body	(PRINCIPAL ACTIONS are listed in CAPITAL LETTERS)
<i>Blood and Circulatory System</i>	blood purifier • lowers cholesterol
<i>Body System</i>	reduces inflammation • ANTI-CATARRHAL (eliminates mucous conditions) • restlessness • stimulant (increases internal heat, dispels chill, and strengthens metabolism and circulation)
<i>Digestive Tract</i>	bitter (stimulates digestive juices and improves appetite) • digestive disorders • stomach catarrh • ulcers • GAS • nausea • anti-emetic (relieves nausea and vomiting) • emetic (induces vomiting, in large doses) • carminative (brings warmth and circulation, relieves intestinal gas discomfort, and promotes peristaltic movement) • laxative • BOWEL SPASMS • abdominal pains • BILIOUS COLIC (severe abdominal pain due to sluggish liver or gallstones) • diverticulitis (inflammation of out-pouches of the bowel wall) • IBS (irritable bowel syndrome) • intestinal irritation
<i>Endocrine System</i>	Addison's disease (impaired adrenal gland function) • exhaustion
<i>Infections and Immune System</i>	allergies • diaphoretic (promotes perspiration) • cholera (serious infectious disease with vomiting, diarrhea, cramps, fever, and dehydration)
<i>Inflammation</i>	anti-inflammatory • ARTHRITIS • rheumatism • bursitis
<i>Liver</i>	gallbladder • gallbladder tonic (increases energy and

	strength) • hepatic (supports and stimulates the liver, gallbladder and spleen, and increases the flow of bile) • LIVER PROBLEMS • hepatitis (liver inflammation) • hardening and blocking of liver • cholagogue (promotes bile flow) • jaundice
<i>Lungs and Respiratory System</i>	expectorant (loosens and removes phlegm from the respiratory tract) • bronchitis • spasmodic hiccup • SPASMODIC ASTHMA • whooping cough (also known as pertussis, a contagious disease with severe coughing and 'whooping' sound upon inhalation) • lung congestion
<i>Muscles</i>	cramps • MUSCLE PAIN
<i>Nervous System</i>	nervine (improves nerve function) • nerves • nervous disorders • neuralgia (sharp, stabbing pains) • pain • anodyne (relieves pain and reduces nerve excitability) • sciatica (nerve pain in lower back, sometimes radiating downward) • SPASMS • ANTI-SPASMODIC • relaxant • sedative (relieves tension of nerves and muscles)
<i>Poisons</i>	brown recluse spider bites • insect stings
<i>Reproductive System</i>	<i>Female:</i> • female problems • MENSTRUAL CRAMPS • dysmenorrhea (painful or difficult menstruation) • birth control • ovarian and uterine pain • uterine cramps • uterine tonic (increases energy and strength of uterus) • helps prevent miscarriage • MORNING SICKNESS • pregnancy • after-birth pains
<i>Skin, Tissues &amp; Hair</i>	boils • scabies (a contagious skin condition) • contact dermatitis • psoriasis
<i>Urinary Tract</i>	urinary problems • diuretic (increases urine flow)
<i>Other Uses</i>	contains raw source material for producing many of the steroid hormones, cortisone, and hydrocortisone used in modern medicine

### **Key Properties:**

- CHOLAGOGUE and digestive – stimulates the activity of the liver and natural flow of bile, improves digestive function
- ANTI-CATARRHAL – very valuable in catarrhal conditions of the pulmonary system, urinary and digestive tracts, and female organs
- nervine – beneficial in cases of nervous excitability, enhances nerve health, relaxes nerve firing, soothes painful inflammation and spasms
- hormone-like – enhances progesterone activity, has steroid precursor

components which reduce inflammation and relax muscles

**Primarily affecting:** MUSCLES • MUCOUS MEMBRANES • LIVER  
• REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS

<p><b>History</b></p>	<p>The genus name Dioscorea honors the Roman physician and naturalist, Dioscorides (ca. 40-90 AD). Wild Yam's common name is derived from the West African word 'nyami', meaning 'to eat.' Many of the roots in the Dioscorea genus are edible, although <i>D. villosa</i> is quite bitter.</p> <p>There is no record of how wild yam came to be called 'Devil's Bones', but when the name is applied to the roots, it makes some sense. They are long, thin, and twisted as they meander below the surface of the soil and have a skeletal appearance.</p> <p>The Chinese used wild yam to brighten the eyes and as an elixir, while the Aztec and Mayan natives used wild yam as a pain reliever. Aztec records show that 'chipahuacxihuitl', or 'the graceful plant' (we know as wild yam) was used for skin ailments such as scabies and boils.</p> <p>In both Mexico and America, natives used wild yam for birth control and to prevent miscarriage. Native Americans used a root tea to relieve labor pains, and European settlers found in wild yam a remedy for colic (hence its common name 'colic root').</p> <p>Wild Yam roots were employed for bilious (liver) colic and abdominal cramps by physicians in the Confederate Army during the Civil War.</p> <p>Eclectic physicians, a branch of American medicine popular in the early 1900's, made use of botanical remedies along with other substances and physical therapy in their practices. They found wild yams useful for treating gastro-intestinal problems (such as irritation of the digestive tract and chronic 'gastritis of drunkards'), asthma and rheumatism. The herb was considered to be an antispasmodic and anodyne by Eclectic doctors.</p>
<p><b>Attributes</b></p>	<p><b><u>Key Components:</u> (including, but not limited to)</b></p>
<p><i>Nutrients</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Bitter</u> • <u>Saponins</u> including <u>Dioscin</u> and <u>Diosgenin</u></li><li>• <u>Alkaloids</u> including <u>Dioscorin</u></li></ul>

	<p>The outer bark of the wild yam root is high in saponins (steroid-like components), including dioscin and diosgenin, and alkaloids such as dioscorin. Each of these components have anti-inflammatory and muscle relaxant properties that seem to work on the muscles of the abdomen and pelvis, nutritionally support the reproductive organs, and effectively treat arthritic and rheumatic conditions.</p>
<p><i>Nervine Anti-Spasmodic</i></p>	<p>Wild Yam root yields an important alkaloid substance which relaxes the muscles of the stomach walls and the entire abdomen region. This alkaloid also acts as a sedative on the nerves governing these areas and gives relief from pain.</p> <p>Dried wild yam is relaxing and soothing to the nerves. It is valuable in cases of nervous excitability as a relaxant and anti-spasmodic that prevents cramping. It is used for abdominal cramps, bowel spasms, menstrual, and uterine cramps.</p>
<p><i>Digestion</i></p>	<p>Wild Yam provides excellent benefits to the function of the gallbladder and liver. It helps to promote the flow of bile and is used for biliary colic, pains of gallstones, and irritation and spasms of the abdomen and intestines. It also relieves chronic problems associated with flatulence (gas) and counteracts nausea.</p>
<p><i>Anti-Catarrhal</i></p>	<p>Wild Yam is one of the best herbal remedies to reduce mucous membrane congestion and inflammation. It is valuable in pulmonary, digestive, uterine, and urinary catarrhal conditions.</p>
<p><i>Blood Purifier and Circulation</i></p>	<p>Wild Yam stimulates the removal of waste and congestion in the body and relieves stiff, sore joints. Wild Yam has the ability to dilate (open) blood vessels and lower blood pressure and serum cholesterol levels. These properties indirectly improve liver health by increasing its efficiency and reducing liver stress.</p> <p>The therapeutic effect of saponins on patients with atherosclerosis and hypertension was confirmed in clinical practice. A study of elderly adults found that an extract of wild yam showed antioxidant properties and raised HDL (High Density Lipoprotein, the good cholesterol) levels.</p> <p>Research has also shown that the diosgenin in wild yam extract has good to excellent anti-inflammatory activity and can soothe stiff arthritic joints and relieve rheumatic pain.</p>

*Adrenal Glands*

Wild Yam has been used historically for those with exhausted adrenal glands. It is indicated for problems with the adrenal glands and low blood sugar.

*Women*

Wild Yam soothes ovarian and uterine pain and menstrual cramps. It is a glandular balancing agent that counteracts nausea in pregnant women when given in small, frequent doses throughout pregnancy. Wild Yam has a potent tonic effect on the uterus and alleviates pregnancy pain, nausea, and cramping. It particularly relieves cramps in the region of the uterus during the last trimester of pregnancy.

The herb also reduces the threat of miscarriage and can relieve after-birth pains. Wild Yam root powder is often combined with powdered ginger, false unicorn and red raspberry in herbal preparations to further help prevent miscarriage.

Mexican wild yam has been used as a contraceptive for many years by Mexican and Native American women. They claim that if the roots are eaten every day for over two months, conception will not occur. Ovulation and the menstrual cycle will not be interrupted, but women's eggs are resistant to fertilization during the period the wild yam is ingested. When a woman wanted to become pregnant, she merely stopped eating the yam and within one month, she would be fertile again. It is my observation that this is effective only if you have the purest of diets and take no chemical medications.

Mexican wild yam was the source of the original contraceptive pill before pharmaceutical companies started making them synthetically. There are clinics in California who have used Mexican wild yam in balancing out the masculine hormones of females. The herb also helps with hot flashes and vaginal discharge.

It is believed by many that the efficacy of wild yam for helping the body heal premenstrual syndrome (PMS), symptoms associated with menopause, and other hormonal imbalances, is due more to the antispasmodic, tonic, and nutritive qualities, and not because the herb is a 'progesterone precursor.'

It appears that the body may not directly change the hormone precursors found in wild yam into active hormones (as is done in the chemical lab). Rather, the body uses the

nutritional support provided naturally in wild yams to support the reproductive organs and promote hormone balance.

*Steroid-Like*

It is believed that the steroidal effects wild yam has on the body are not because it contains steroidal hormones, but because the nutrients found in wild yam have similar effects. The body recognizes them as food and does not mistake them for its own hormones, but uses them in a similar manner. Steroidal saponins in wild yam can help alleviate muscle strain and stress.

Most wild yam hormone creams on the market contain synthetic progesterone. Synthetic progesterone in cream form does indeed have a strong hormonal influence, but it forces hormonal reactions, and is not as healing to the body.

Creams made with natural wild yam alone have a gentler hormonal influence on the body that nurtures and assists the body in balancing and healing the hormone functions of the body. It is my belief that it is much more effective to ingest wild yam than to take it trans-dermally (through the skin) in creams. However, this is truly a personal choice. Some people love wild yam cream and have great results with it.

*Other Uses*

The root of wild yam contains dioscin, from which the steroidal saponin 'diosgenin' is extracted. Diosgenin's discovery by Japanese researchers in 1936 later led to lab synthesis of the hormone progesterone and to the first birth-control pill. In the lab, the precursor diosgenin is converted chemically into progesterone.

Great quantities of wild yam were collected in the wild or cultivated in Mexico to supply diosgenin. It became the substance which labs used to make the following products: human sex hormones (birth control pills), drugs to treat menopause, dysmenorrhea, premenstrual syndrome, testicular deficiency, impotency, prostate hypertrophy, and psycho-sexual disorders, high blood pressure, arterial spasms, migraines, and other ailments.

Since 1970, diosgenin has been completely synthesized in the laboratory for commercial products.

Widely prescribed cortisones and hydrocortisones were indirect products of Dioscorea plants, used for Addison's disease, some allergies, bursitis, contact dermatitis, psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis, sciatica, brown recluse spider bites, insect stings, and other disorders.

<b>Herb Parts Used</b>	Rhizomes (underground stems) and roots are used
<p data-bbox="272 247 540 321"><b>Preparations and Remedies</b></p> <p data-bbox="272 426 540 457"><i>Powdered Formula</i></p> <p data-bbox="345 495 540 569"><i>Infusions and Decoctions</i></p>	<p data-bbox="581 247 1442 394">Wild Yam is found in bulk for making teas. Do not try grinding wild yam root in the blender, for it is very tough and may break the blades. It is easier to buy the herb already powdered or cut and sifted.</p> <p data-bbox="581 426 1271 457"><i>Liver Formula:</i> (see MILK THISTLE preparations)</p> <p data-bbox="581 495 1430 747">Place wild yam root (cut) in a saucepan and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil, then turn heat down and simmer for about 20 minutes. Strain and drink the infusion 1-3 times a day for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or pain associated with labor, diverticulitis or menstruation. The decoction will strengthen if allowed to sit for at least 8 hours, then returned to the stove to a simmer for another 20 minutes.</p> <p data-bbox="581 789 1430 999">Take 1 tablespoon of the warm decoction every 30 minutes for colic, abdominal and intestinal irritation, spasms, spasmodic asthma, vomiting and hepatic congestion, until symptoms are relieved. To counteract nausea, take frequent, small, 2-ounce doses (with honey added, if desired) until feeling better.</p> <p data-bbox="581 1041 1430 1115">Take one to three cups of cold wild yam decoction during the day for liver disorders, rheumatic pains and spasms.</p> <p data-bbox="581 1157 886 1188"><i>Pregnancy Decoction</i></p> <p data-bbox="581 1188 1065 1335">1 teaspoon Wild Yam root, cut 1/2 teaspoon Ginger, dried 1 teaspoon Red Raspberry leaves 1 teaspoon False Unicorn</p> <p data-bbox="581 1377 1414 1482">Combine herbs and steep in one pint hot water for twenty minutes. Strain and take a mouthful every half hour to strengthen the uterus and when threatened by miscarriage.</p> <p data-bbox="581 1524 1349 1556"><i>Liver/ Jaundice Tonic:</i> (see DANDELION preparations)</p>
Herb Combinations	<p data-bbox="581 1587 1430 1734">Wild Yam combines well with other herbs. When using wild yam as a uterine agent, combine with ginger, red raspberry leaves and false unicorn. For pulmonary and stomach areas, mix with cayenne and goldenseal root.</p> <p data-bbox="581 1776 1430 1881">Due to the hardness of the root, macerating time (soaking to soften and release constituents) needs to be continued for up to five weeks (with daily agitation).</p>



*Harvesting* | If possible, gather and dry the root each year. Rhizomes are harvested in autumn. The plant is dug while dormant, washed and thinly sliced while still fresh, then dried. Roots must be dried before they are used as an herb.