



# Oregon Grape

Oregon Grape is one of our most valuable herbs and thought to be unequalled in helping to purify the blood and liver of wastes and promoting a healthy gallbladder. It is also an effective antifungal and antibacterial. Moreover, Oregon Grape helps to treat many skin problems and ease digestive disorders.

**Information:** Herbals/Nutritionals/Medicinals can be very strong. Consequently, if they are not tailored to your specific needs, they can do more harm than good. This information is meant to be used by your VHC Medical Team and personal Physician as they build your Total Health Plan. Never attempt to adjust your prescribed medications and/or Natural Treatments without your physician's and Medical Team's knowledge and guidance. Since herbals/nutritionals and medications can interact with each other, it is always advisable to consult with your health care provider and The Vibrant Health Community at [www.VibrantHealthCommunity.com](http://www.VibrantHealthCommunity.com) (or call 1-866-378-8253) before starting or changing your program.

**Botanical:** *Mahonia aquifolium* (also known as *Mahonia nervosa*)

**Family:** *Berberidaceae* (barberry/barley)

**Other common names:** Mountain Grape, Oregon Grapeholly, Oregon Barberry, Alegrita, Holly-leaved Barberry, California Barberry, Mahonia, Mountain Holly, Pepperidge, Sourberry, Sowberry, Yellow Root

**History:** Oregon Grape, the state flower of Oregon, derives its name from its use as a medicine and food along the Oregon Trail, and that popularity as a food and medicine nearly led to its extinction in the late nineteenth century. Both the leaves and root bark of this evergreen perennial are used medicinally, and the root, containing the powerful alkaloid, berberine, was officially included in the *United States Pharmacopoeia* from 1905 to 1916. Oregon Grape was originally thought to be a species of *Berberis* and later determined to belong to its own genus, *Mahonia*, but all the species belong to the same plant family. Oregon Grape closely resembles Barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*) in its chemistry and is used in similar ways, but the slightly different composition of the antiseptic alkaloid, berberine, makes it a better liver tonic. Oregon Grape has been called *yerba de la sangre* (herb of the blood), indicating its importance as a blood purifier. The smaller *Mahonia repens* (creeping Oregon Grape) is also used for similar medicinal applications. Oregon Grape was included in many culinary preparations, including a jelly that is rich in vitamin C, and was also used as a greenish-yellow dye. Blackfoot Indians called it *Ot-*

*to-gue* and used it to check rectal hemorrhage, dysentery and stomach troubles. The Kwakiutl made a bark tea to offset an excess of bile, and Oregon Grape was also found to be beneficial for open boils, kidney troubles and as an antiseptic for wounds. In Europe today, Oregon Grape is used topically to treat psoriasis and dry skin rashes. Some of the principal constituents in Oregon Grape include alkaloids (especially berberine, berbamine, isocorydin and oxyacanthine), tannins and vitamin C.

**Beneficial Uses:** Oregon Grape is probably unequalled as a corrector of liver secretions. The root purifies the blood and cleanses the liver by stimulating bile flow and releasing toxins. Some American herbalists believe that while strengthening the liver, it will also alleviate liver-related symptoms, such as jaundice, headache, toxic blood, poor digestion and gallbladder complaints. Oregon Grape helps the liver to metabolize wastes and toxins and has been said to be useful in the treatment of chronic hepatitis-B. Modern herbalists use the root to cleanse

the spleen and it is also thought to lessen the size of the spleen.

The berberine content in Oregon Grape is believed to possess a wide spectrum of antifungal and antibacterial activity and has been used to stop diarrhea caused by toxic pathogens, such as bacterial dysentery. Some studies also claimed that its antibacterial activity has countered such important germs as *E.coli* and *N. meningitides*, among others. Berberine and other alkaloids have also been shown to kill a wide range of microbes and have been effective in human studies for speeding recovery from giardia, a parasite causing contagious diarrhea, and cholera.

Used internally and externally, Oregon Grape root has been found to be very effective for reducing and preventing psoriatic lesions. With its blood cleansing and antibacterial qualities, it has been found to be helpful in treating various skin problems, such as acne, boils, rashes and eczema.

Oregon Grape is said to regulate the digestive system. It is a bitter that is thought to stimulate and improve the function of the digestive organs, increasing hydrochloric acid in the stomach and digestive secretions that aid assimilation of foods. It is said to smooth mucous membranes and alleviate digestive complaints, including nausea and gastritis. Some studies claim that its use helps to remove obstructions in the intestinal tract and stimulate sluggish bowels. Herbalists sometimes use Oregon Grape as an overall tonic to benefit delicate and convalescing people.

Berberine (found in Oregon Grape, Barberry, Goldenseal, and the roots and bark of a number of plants) is now the focus of attention for use in diabetic care. In a report from *Medical News Today*

(Diabetes News/August, 2006), a collaboration of Chinese, Korean and Australian scientists at Sydney's Garvan Institute revealed that berberine could be a valuable new treatment for this disease, giving scientific backing for its glucose lowering effects that were documented in Chinese literature and long used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Garvan scientist, Dr. Jiming Ye claimed that in lab tests, the berberine activates an enzyme in the muscle and liver that is involved in improving sensitivity of the tissue to insulin, which, in turn, helps lower blood sugar levels. Moreover, the berberine might help to reduce body weight. Professor James, the head of Garvan's Diabetes and Obesity Research Program added that despite berberine's widespread use in Traditional Chinese Medicine, it would have to be evaluated following the defined clinical trials process.

Studies in China have shown that an alkaloid in Oregon Grape, called berbamine, can help to protect bone marrow and promote recovery after chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

**Contraindications:** Berberine-containing plants (Barberry, Oregon Grape, Goldenseal, etc.) should not be used by pregnant or nursing women. Those who suffer from hyperthyroid conditions should not take Oregon Grape, and diabetics should use Oregon Grape only under the supervision of a physician. There is some evidence that berberine may interfere with the efficacy of tetracycline medications. High doses (many times the recommended amount) may cause vomiting, lowered blood pressure and lowered heart rate, lethargy, nosebleed, skin, eye and kidney irritation. Do not take Oregon Grape Root if you have chronic diarrhea, a duodenal ulcer or excessive stomach acid, as it could make these conditions worse. Oregon Grape root is not recommended for prolonged use.

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