



MONTHLY MEDICINAL PLANTS

My plant for the month of September is Oregon grape. The local species is *Mahonia nervosa*. Oregon grape is a low-lying shrub with spiky evergreen leaves slightly resembling holly. It has a yellow flower in the spring and a dark blue bitter berry in the fall, and is fairly common in wooded areas of Lasqueti. The part that is used medicinally is the root, although the leaves also possess the same properties, they are just not as potent.

If collecting, it is best to collect leaves in the spring and roots in the late summer to fall. The roots are very tough and become tougher when dried, so it is best to chop up while still fresh. I use the leaves to infuse into oil for topical use, and I generally tincture the root in alcohol, as the alkaloids in Oregon grape are not as soluble in water as in alcohol. That being said the tea is still effective, just not as strong as the tincture. One of the active constituents in Oregon grape is berberine (also found in goldenseal), which has a yellow color. If making a tea simmer until the water is yellow.

Medicinally, Oregon grape has three main functions: as a bitter, a liver stimulant and as an anti-microbial. As a bitter it is helpful taken before meals for people with sluggish digestion, who have difficulty digesting fats and tend towards constipation. It will stimulate the flow of gastric juices and bile to aid digestion.

As a liver herb Oregon grape stimulates the liver function to help clear toxins (and used hormones) from the body. Signs that the liver may need some help are skin conditions, slow wound healing, bad breath, moodiness or PMS.

As an anti-microbial Oregon grape is active against many bacteria and fungi. It can be used topically in this way to clean wounds, or on bacterial skin conditions like cellulitis or impetigo. The tea is very useful as a wash for eye infections like conjunctivitis. The tea, tincture, or chewing on a root can be very helpful for infected teeth and gums. Taken internally, these anti-microbial properties can treat infections in the gastro-intestinal system, but it does not cross easily into the blood so is not so useful for systemic or blood infections. It is great for treating G.I. infections like dysentery, cholera, candida, giardia, or for food poisoning from bacteria laden food.

Oregon grape is a very useful and powerful local plant that is great to have in our backyards for first aid and infection treatment.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me at: hydrax23@gmail.com

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