



The History And Uses of Bilberry

Bilberry has been used most commonly for centuries as a food, with the English traditionally eating bilberries with a rich cream. Large amounts of bilberries were imported annually from Holland, Germany and Scandinavia for use by pastry cooks and restaurant keepers to make jams, liqueurs, wines, and desserts up until World War II. Bilberry's use is not only limited to food, as the juice of bilberry yields a clear, dark blue or purplish dye that has often been used to color wool in England.

Over the years, the bilberry fruit has gained recognition for its medicinal properties. Decoctions of the leaves and bark of the root have been used for a topical application to treat mouth and throat ulcers. Syrups have also been made from a mixture of the berries and honey to treat intestinal issues.

Additionally, the berries are very rich in vitamin C, with their astringent action explaining their historical use for diarrhea and dysentery. Many believe that the berries contain a pigment that can kill many strains of bacteria. Bilberry fruit and tea that are dried have been used to treat nausea as well as indigestion. Along with the above, other traditional applications of bilberry include inflammation of the mucous membranes in the mouth and throat, eyestrain or fatigue, and as a circulatory tonic. The leaves and berries have also been used for a homeopathic treatment of diabetes.

One of the main reasons that bilberry's medicinal value came to attention in the Western world was because of its legendary ability to improve the nighttime vision of the British Royal Air force pilots during World War II. After consuming bilberry, it was found that they experienced improved visual acuity, making it easier to carry out nighttime bombing raids. It was also found that their eyes could adjust to darkness quicker and their vision was able to better correct after the effects of prolonged glare.

In the proceeding years, scientific research found that bilberry offered a wide range of benefits for both vision and other vascular disorders. French studies found that bilberry supplementation significantly enhanced the ability to adjust for glare and darkness. Bilberry can help to prevent compromised vision for anyone who is susceptible to eyestrain. In the last few decades, more studies have confirmed the medicinal value of bilberry for a variety of eye disorders. Bilberry is routinely used by European medical practitioners for patients with cataracts, venous insufficiency, visual disorders, peptic ulcers, capillary fragility, and even dysmenorrhea.

Finally, bilberry has a great effect on the activity of many enzymes that participate in inflammatory responses. Those who bruise easily or have trouble with capillary

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weakness can benefit from the anthocyanidin content of bilberry. These anthocyanidins offer many actions including: stimulating the production of collagen; protecting existing collagen stores in the connective tissue; preventing the formation and release of inflammatory compounds including histamine, prostaglandins, and leukotrienes; preventing certain enzyme reactions that occur as a result of inflammatory conditions; and scavenging for free radicals to reduce cellular damage from oxidizing agents.



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