

~ Ask Granny Earth ~

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Skullcap

ASK GRANNY EARTH

How do you use Skullcap? Is it a locally grown herb? Can I make a tea out of it for medicinal use?

Skullcap is such a wonderful herb. It is Native to America and was traditionally used by the Cherokee Indians for menstrual problems, to relieve breast pain and to encourage expulsion of the placenta in childbirth. Later, in the 1800's it was found to be an effective treatment for rabies (hence its nick name- mad dog weed) as well as epilepsy. Now days it's mainly used as a tonic that exerts a restorative, nourishing action on the body and as sedative for the nerves, because it calms and relaxes.

Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*): *Scutellaria* refers to the Latin, 'Scutella', which means small dish and refers to part of the flower that resembles a cap

or small dish in appearance. Some of its other common names are: Blue Skullcap, Blue Pimpernel, Helmet Flower, Quakers Hat and Mad Dog Weed.

This herb is a perennial, growing up to 2 feet tall with an erect, many-branched stem and pink to blue flowers. Skullcap is a member of the Mint family and is very hardy. If you go hiking along creek banks next summer, you're sure to find it growing there in undisturbed areas. It thrives in damp, moist conditions and needs lots of sun. Take your herb picture book with you for definite identification. You could pick a few clippings, making sure to get plenty of leaves - hang upside down in a warm, dark room until dry. Then 'skin' the stems and store leaves and flowers in a paper bag, or jar for later use.

There are about 100 species of *Scutellaria* in all with the most common being *S. lateriflora* (American Skullcap) and *S. baicalensis* (Baical Skullcap - native to China, Mongolia and Russia). They are all known to have the following actions: sedative, nervine tonic, antispasmodic, mild bitters, diuretic and anti-inflammatory.

Bitter herbs have an affinity for the liver and its functions, while a nervine refers to properties within the herb that are reputed for aiding and restoring the nervous system. An anti-inflammatory herb such as Skullcap, can reduce inflammation in any condition and as a result, alleviate pain. In the 1800's, the Physiomedicalists first discovered Skullcap's use as a nerve tonic. They determined that it had a deeper action on the nervous system than any other herb and used it for hysteria, epilepsy, convulsions and rabies as well as for serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia.

Jethro Kloss, the famous herbalist who lived from 1863 to 1946, states in his book, [Back to Eden](#), "Skullcap is one of the best nerve tonics available. It quiets and soothes the nerves of anyone (who is) easily excited and is good for quieting delirium tremens or producing a restful sleep. Use it for neuralgia, aches and pains, convulsions, fits, rheumatism, epilepsy and bites of poisonous insects and snakes. It also suppresses excessive sexual desire".

So let's review what Skullcap does: it calms the nervous system, reduces spasms, inflammation and pain and aids the liver in its ability to detox the system. Skullcap is an excellent herb for alleviating the anxiety that accompanies today's highly stressful life style and for the little aches and pains, which are due to tension and tightness of muscles in these situations.

I used to recommend a remedy (containing Skullcap) for addictions, called - Freedom Tonic, because it relieved severe anxiety and subtle, non-discriminative pain, which I believe is at the base of all addiction. It is my opinion that in addiction, the body is craving relief from an internal, physical stress, caused by an imbalance within the system. In an effort to feel better, the person reaches for the closest thing he/she can get for that 'quick fix' and for a time the body does feel better. But as with any drug, only the

symptoms are being suppressed, the underlying condition is not healed. But since the body 'remembers' the good feeling of no pain, the person again reaches for the drug, thus becoming addicted. By using herbal healing, the body is actually getting what it needs to stabilize the underlying condition of internal, physical stress, which in my opinion is causing the cravings in the first place.

Skullcap, once in the body, works to balance the system, giving it what it needs to heal itself. It is mildly diuretic, having the ability to flush toxins out of the system. It is extremely important that as we take herbs for healing, we provide support to the elimination organs, such as the kidneys, for proper excretion of toxins. This healthy elimination will make the 'healing crisis' or the 'die-off' process less noticeable.

You can make a tea using Skullcap, just as you would any other herb tea-Bring 1 –2 cups water to a boil. Turn down the heat and add a large pinch (about 1 teaspoon full); simmer with lid on for 5 to 10 minutes. Add a little honey for taste and sip until desired effect is achieved. I would not recommend this herb however, if you are pregnant or lactating.