

olive leaf



For centuries, the fresh leaves of the olive tree have been used for their healing properties. Find out why

Olive trees, *Olea europaea*, have been cultivated in Europe since well before 2500 BC and jars of olive oil have been found at historic sites such as the citadel at the old city of Mycenae in Greece. In ancient Europe, the oil was burned in lamps and used in cooking and formed the basis of many scented oils. The Greeks associated it with the goddess Athena, who was seen as a symbol of wisdom.

In the early 1900s, scientists discovered a bitter chemical compound called oleuropein in the leaves of some olive trees, which proved to be partly responsible for their resistance to disease. Oleuropein has strong antibacterial and antifungal activity. It is found throughout the tree, but the highest levels are in the leaves. It also occurs in the fruits and is one of the compounds that prevents olive oil from spoiling.

Ancient origins

Olive leaves have featured in medicine for thousands of years. They were used in ancient Egyptian and

THE LOW-DOWN

PROPERTIES: antioxidant, diuretic, anti-arrhythmic.

GOOD FOR: hypertension, coughs, fevers, oedema, asthma, eczema, psoriasis, colds and flu.

AVAILABLE FORMS: dried leaf, liquid extract, tea.

Mediterranean cultures to treat a variety of conditions. Olive leaf is the first botanical cited in the Bible (Ezekiel 47:12) as a natural healer: 'The fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.'

Traditionally, the leaf has been valued as an astringent and antiseptic. Leaf teas, as well as the bark, were used throughout the ages to treat fevers. The leaf tea was also used as a mild diuretic and to treat malaria. Poultices were made from the leaves to treat boils, skin rashes and sprains.

Medicinal benefits

Olives and olive oil have long been a valued addition to the Mediterranean diet because of their health-giving properties. These include a reduction in risk factors for heart disease. Now, recent European studies have shown that olive-leaf extracts have powerful antioxidant properties.

While high levels of monounsaturated fats in olive oil (made from the crushed or pressed fruit) mean that it is good for the heart, the plant's leaves have been shown to contain 10 times the level of disease-fighting antioxidants.

Olive-leaf extract is thought to be a useful treatment for the common cold, flu, cold sores (herpes), ear infections, eye infections, nose and

throat infections, impetigo, pink eye and parasites, as well as a host of bacterial, viral and fungal infections. It may also

be beneficial in helping to combat ageing, protecting against cardiovascular disease and protecting the nervous system. It has also been used with some success for boosting energy levels, which may be good

news if you are tired or suffering from chronic fatigue.

Some cosmetic companies are also now adding olive-leaf extract to their products on the premise that it has antibacterial properties and can help to soothe the skin.

How to take it

Olive leaves can be made into a tea (see above), taken as a supplement or liquid, or applied topically to help heal wounds. Always follow the usage instructions on the packet.

WATCH POINT

When you first start taking olive-leaf extracts, you may feel tired and headachy and experience joint pains. This is the body's natural reaction to the cleansing process and will pass. It is important to drink plenty of water between doses to help your liver and kidneys get rid of any toxins.

To make a tea...

- Boil approximately 2.25 litres (4 pints) of water, then place 10g (1/2oz) of olive leaves in an infuser.
- Reduce heat to a simmer and allow tea to brew for around 15 minutes. Stir occasionally.
- Strain before drinking or leaving to cool and refrigerating.