

Eriodictyon californicum

[Synonyms : *Eriodictyon glutinosum*]

CALIFORNIA YERBA SANTA is an evergreen shrub. Native to the south-western United States (particularly California, and Oregon) and to northern Mexico, it has small, lavender to white flowers.

It is also known as Bearsweed, Consumptive's weed, Gum bush, Gum leaves, Holy head, Holy herb, Mountain balm, Sacred herb, Tarweed, Wild balsam, Wild peach, Yerba bueno, and Yerba santa.

Californicum means 'of or from California' (United States).

Local North American Indian tribes, including the Karok, used the leaves as an ingredient in a soothing tea. For the Costanoan Indians the shrub meant a source of leaves that could be woven into skirts and aprons. Some tribes smoked them as a tobacco.

Many North American Indians saw the shrub as a medicine chest. It was a remedy for colds for the Costanoan, Yurok, Miwok, Karok, Mendocino Indian, Atsugewi, and Kawaiisu Indians, and the Mahuna, Miwok, Yurok, Pomo and Yuki tribes used it for curing coughs. The Atsugewi Indians turned to the plant for treating whooping-cough, and they and the Mahuna, Costanoan, Miwok and Round Valley Indians also used it to ease rheumatism. Headaches and some eye problems could be treated with it by the Costanoan Indians, and the Miwok tribe applied it on cuts and wounds and also used it to encourage the healing of broken bones. Skin sores were treated with it by the Coahuilla, Yuki, Costanoan, Miwok and some of the Pomo Indians, and the latter with the Costanoan and Round Valley Indians, also used the shrub for various blood disorders. Some venereal diseases were treated with California yerba santa by the Kawaiisu Indians, and they and the Miwok Indians also chose it to deal with various stomach upsets. The Mahuna tribe used the shrub for pneumonia, it was part of the Karok treatment for pleurisy, asthma was eased with it by the Mahuna tribe, the Mendocino Indians and the Costanoans, and the latter as well as the Karok and Round Valley Indians also chose it as a remedy for tuberculosis. It was a treatment for fever among the Round Valley Indian tribe and some of the Pomo tribe.

Medicinally, it was taken in remedies for respiratory disorders and colds, and used as a flavouring. Today apart from still being used to mask the flavour of quinine (*Cinchona officinalis*) in syrups, it can also be employed in treating asthma and bronchitis.