



## Herb of the Month: Osha root

Osha (*Ligusticum porteri*) is an herbal plant native to the Rocky Mountains of North America and can be found at altitudes of up to 10,000 ft. It is a perennial growing in rich, moist soil often found in aspen groves, upland meadows or ravines. Osha is a relative of the European lovage plant and is a member of the Umbelliferae family, as is parsley and dill, and it has the same long thin hollow stalk with large divided leaves that can reach to heights of 2 to 3 feet. The seeds and flowers are at the top of the plant and spread out in the form of an umbrella, hence its Latin family name. This herb has white flowers and the seeds have a sweet and strong celery-like fragrance, as does the entire plant. The root is very hairy, brown on the outside and yellow on the inside.

The plant has several other names: Chuchupate, Indian parsley, Porter's lovage, mountain lovage, bear root, bear medicine, nipo and Colorado cough root. Chuchupate is the common Mexican name for Osha and is said to be an ancient Aztec term meaning "bear medicine." Bears respond to the herb like cats do to catnip. They will roll on it and cover themselves with its scent. Males have been seen digging up the roots and offering them to females as part of a courting ritual. When a bear first comes out of hibernation, it will eat Osha root to cleanse its digestive system. The bear will chew the root into a watery paste, spit it on its paws and wash its face and whole body with the herb. The bear's use of herbs for its own healing is the reason that the bear is considered to be the prime healing animal in many cultures. Any herb plant that is considered to be "bear medicine" is a potent and primary one. This is one of the most important herbs of the Rocky Mountains, considered sacred by the Native Americans and widely esteemed by them for its broad and effective warm healing power. Many tribes burned it as incense for purification to ward off airborne illness in their homes and also subtle negative influences and thoughts. Osha is said to be associated with mystical dreaming as well. The strength of this herb is immediately apparent by its strong odor and illustrates superiority over the Chinese (*ligusticum wallichii*) variety, which has very different healing properties.

The root of Osha is the part used medicinally. Energetically it is spicy, bitter and warm. The healing components in this powerful herb include volatile oils, essential oils, terpenes, lactone glycoside, saponins, ferulic acid, and phytosterols. Its healing properties are antiviral (a substance that destroys or weakens a virus), diaphoretic (producing perspiration), diuretic (increases the flow of urine), decongestant (breaks up congestion), expectorant (helps bring up mucus), stimulant (increasing activity), carminative (inducing expulsion of gas from stomach or intestines), and emmenagogue (provokes menstruation).

Osha root is a powerful antiviral and antibacterial herb strongly used for the respiratory system and mildly used for other body systems. It is used for such conditions as head colds with dry or wet cough, irritating coughs, bronchial infections and sore throats. It is also used to treat flues, fevers, pharyngitis, early stages of tonsillitis, pneumatic complaints, indigestion and delayed menses.

If one were using Osha root for upset stomach, nausea with vomiting, gastrointestinal discomfort or indigestion, then brewing a tea would be ideal. Place one tablespoon of dried root with a pint of spring water and simmer for 15-20 minutes. Let the tea cool and drink one cup at a time. It can even increase the appetite after the stomach is settled. Because of its strong antiviral properties, it should be taken at the first minimal signs of a cold or flu. It is extremely beneficial and effective combined with Echinacea against leukocytosis (increase of white blood cells), which is usually indicative of an impending infection. It can also be used externally on skin wounds for prevention of infection.

You will find Osha Root in Good Earth's bulk herb department, in extract and capsule form.

