



WITCH HAZEL EXTRACT - Astringent

Witch hazel is an astringent produced from the leaves and bark of the North American Witch Hazel shrub (*Hamamelis virginiana*), which grows naturally from Nova Scotia west to Ontario, Canada and south to Florida, and Texas in the United States. This plant was widely used for medicinal purposes by American Indians. The witch hazel extract was obtained by steaming the twigs of the shrub.

The essential oil of witch hazel is not sold separately as a consumer product. The plant does not produce enough essential oil to make production viable. However, there are various distillates of witch hazel (called hydrosols or hydrolats) that are gentler than the "drug store" witch hazel and contain alcohol.

Uses

Witch hazel is mainly used externally on sores, bruises, and swelling. The main constituents of the extract include tannin, gallic acid, catechins, proanthocyanins, flavonoids (kaempferol, quercetin), essential oil (carvacrol, eugenol, hexenol), choline, saponins, and bitters. Distilled witch hazel sold in drug stores and pharmacies typically contains no tannin.

Witch hazel hydrosol is used in skin care. It closes open pores. It is a strong anti-oxidant and astringent, which makes it very useful in fighting acne. It is often used as a natural remedy for psoriasis, eczema, aftershave applications, ingrown nails, to prevent sweating of the face, cracked or blistered skin, for treating insect bites, poison ivy, and as a treatment for varicose veins and hemorrhoids. (It is found in numerous over-the-counter hemorrhoid preparations.)

Witch hazel is also traditionally known as a good first reaction against shaving cuts and abrasions for men and women, and it is also recommended by The Doctors Book of Home Remedies as effective for helping soothe sunburn.

Witch hazel is also commonly used in treatments for haemorrhoids as it is one of the few remedies that not only soothe but also shrink them.

Non-medicinal uses

Witch hazel can be used instead of hair spray or other holding products for normal to oily hair when curling one's hair.

The drug store product witch hazel has also been found to be useful in the restoration or renewal of old furniture finishes. When poured onto a flat wood surface with significant crazing in the old lacquer or varnish and left to sit, the witch hazel will essentially "melt" or soften the surface.