

Nature's Field

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Oregon Grape

Berberis aquifolium

by Steven Horne



Photo by Steven Horne

Hiking in the mountains of Utah, I often find the holly-like leaves of Oregon Grape. In the spring, bright yellow flowers can be spotted amid the leaves and in the fall, dark, purplish-blue berries. The berries are edible, but just barely, due to their very sour, almost bitter flavor. Still, I once gathered some and mixed them half and half with regular grape juice and made an excellent grape jelly, so they sweeten up very nicely.

In herbal medicine, it's the root that's the medicinal part. It's one of several plants that contain berberine alkaloids, which have a mild antibacterial action. The species I find in Utah is *Berberis repens*, but *B. aquifolium* is the more commonly used species (although both are equally effective). When I was first learning to identify wild plants they classified both species in the genus, *Mahonia* (*M. repens* and *M. aquifolium*), but they've been reclassified in the *Berberis* genus. This makes them close relatives of barberry (*B. vulgaris*), another plant commonly used for its berberine alkaloids. Medicinally, this makes sense, since Oregon grape and barberry have very similar medicinal actions.

The alkaloid berberine is also found in Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*), which has been severely over-harvested and is endangered in many of its natural habitats. While Oregon grape doesn't do everything that goldenseal does, it can act as a substitute in many applications and is much more abundant and less expensive.

Berberine-containing plants have been used as antibacterial and antifungal agents and generally have a tonic effect on intestinal mucosa. They cool intestinal inflammation, promote bile flow and have a gentle laxative effective.

The Chinese use seventeen different barberry varieties in their medicine. All contain berberine and are used mainly to treat various intestinal infections, as well as to stimulate

the uterus and to relax the intestinal smooth muscle. According to Chinese medicine these plants are primarily bitter, astringent, cooling and drying with secondary qualities of being restoring and decongesting.

Various Native American tribes used preparations of the roots of creeping-Oregon grape (*B. repens*) to treat stomach troubles, to prevent bloody dysentery, and as a blood purifier. They also used it for kidney and bladder problems and venereal diseases.

Oregon Grape root bark was traditionally used in America and Europe to treat liver and gallbladder problems, jaundice, indigestion, diarrhea, urinary tract disorders and gout, rheumatism and arthritis. Modern herbalists use it for similar conditions.

While any berberine-bearing plant is likely to have similar actions, Oregon grape is more strongly restorative to the entire system, notably the liver. It is particularly useful in skin eruptions, like psoriasis, and has more affinity for the lymphatic system than barberry or goldenseal. It is a gentler remedy, too, more suitable for children and the elderly.

Oregon grape is sold as a single liquid glycerite, and is also found in Gall Bladder Formula, LBS II, LB-X, BP-X and All Cell Detox. I also use it as a flower essence. The flower essence helps people who are paranoid and/or anticipate hostility in others.

Selected References:

- A Modern Herbal* by M. Grieve
Berberis repens by D. E. Moermann in *Flora of North America*
Principles and Practice of Phytotherapy by Simon Mill and Kerry Bone
The Energetics of Western Herbs by Peter Holmes

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Dental Health Hazards

by Steven H. Horne, RH (AHG)

In March of this year, I was sampling a delicious honey-sweetened caramel from Queen Bee Gardens at the Whole Food Expo, when a most *fortunate* accident occurred. As I was chewing the caramel, it stuck to an old crown and popped it off. As I bit down again, it broke out part of the filling in the tooth next to it. I chipped the crown, too, necessitating its replacement.

I say this was fortunate because one of these teeth contained the last amalgam filling visible in my mouth. So, while I was getting a new crown for the back tooth, I had the tooth next to it repaired, too, which meant I finally got rid of that last amalgam filling. There may still be some under one of my old crowns, but at least all the visible amalgam in my mouth is gone.

It is a milestone in my health improvement program, because I'd been working on ridding my mouth of "silver" for 20 years. I had been getting the work done a little at a time when I could afford it. My decision to get rid of the metal in my mouth was made at an NHF (National Health Freedom) Convention in Anaheim in the 80s. I had heard of the dangers of amalgam fillings from Jack Ritchason and other NSP Managers and had stopped having them put in my mouth, but I wasn't too worried about the ones I already had.

At this NHF Convention, however, there was a booth where a man had one of the machines OSHA uses to test for mercury in the workplace environment. He was having people chew a stick of gum and would take a reading of the level of mercury vapor in their mouth. Most people, after chewing a stick of gum for a couple of minutes, had mercury vapor in their mouths that was 3-5 times higher than what the Federal Government allows in the workplace.

The guy took a while to get to me and I wound up chewing the gum for about 10 minutes. When he took the reading on me the level of mercury in my mouth was 90 times higher than what the government would allow in the workplace. That's when I knew I needed to get that metal out of my mouth.

In case any of you are unaware of the dangers of having a mouth full of "silver" fillings, let me explain to you that there is very little silver in these fillings. They are about half mercury (48-50%). The rest of the filling is typically composed

of silver (15-37%) and various amounts of tin, copper and zinc (0-1%).

The Dangers of Mercury

Mercury is a heavy metal, and one of the most toxic substances known to man. It's third on the EPA's list of the most hazardous environmental pollutants. Mercury is dangerous because it adversely affects both the nervous and the immune system. It depresses the immune system and has been implicated in chronic yeast infections, gum disease, asthma, arthritis, chronic fatigue syndrome, eczema, auto-immune disorders (such as fibromyalgia and multiple sclerosis) and even cancer.

Mercury has an affinity for fats and since the nervous system is 50% fat, mercury is attracted to nervous tissue. This can give rise to learning disorders, memory loss, anxiety, confusion, numbness and even hallucinations. Remember the Mad Hatter from *Alice in Wonderland*? Well, Louis Carroll devised the character because hatters in England often went "mad" because they used mercury to press hats. Today, there are still concerns about mercury being a causal factor in Alzheimer's, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease), autism, depression, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's and senile dementia.

Mercury is a serious risk to pregnant women because it can cross the placenta to the baby where it can accumulate at double the levels of those in the mother. This is particularly serious since mercury is known to be able to cause birth defects such as blindness, brain damage, mental retardation, seizures, cerebral palsy and the inability to speak.

Another problem with mercury is its ability to displace iodine and cause low thyroid function. Mercury can also be involved in kidney and intestinal disorders, including Crohn's disease.

There are two sisters from my area that have been clients of mine. One has MS and the other has a serious weight problem. Both of these problems may be related to mercury poisoning because their mother was a nurse and used to let them play with the mercury from broken thermometers as children. Again, mercury has an affinity for fat, so the one sister's difficulty in losing weight may be due to mercury being stored in fatty tissue. As for the other, I've met several people who claimed they recovered from MS after getting the mercury out of their mouths and their bodies.

This is far from a comprehensive list of what mercury can do to the body, but it gives you an idea of what a serious health hazard this metal is. You can understand why I'm so glad to get it out of my mouth.

Other Interesting Facts About Amalgams

My position on amalgams is very different than the stand taken by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) and the ADA (American Dental Association). They regard amalgam as a generally "safe" material. (See the sidebar on the next page.)

However, I find it odd that two other branches of the government (OSHA and EPA) have determined that mercury is so toxic to human health that levels of mercury should be practically eliminated in the environment and workplace. Yet, somehow having that same mercury vapor in your mouth is considered perfectly safe!

It doesn't make sense to me.

Fortunately, it doesn't make sense to my dentists either. I consider myself very fortunate to have a pair of very talented holistic dentists in the office building next to mine. Dr. Becky

About Nature's Field

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The FDA & ADA on Dental Amalgam

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) considers dental amalgam to be safe. The following is taken from an official FDA website (<http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/consumer/amalgams.html>):

3. What are the safety concerns about dental amalgam?

When amalgam fillings are placed in teeth or removed from teeth, they release mercury vapor. Mercury vapor is also released during chewing. Some people believe that this mercury vapor can cause health problems, including neurological disorders, in certain sensitive individuals.

4. Is there evidence that dental amalgam is unsafe?

Since the 1990s, FDA and other government agencies (CDC, NIH) have reviewed the scientific literature looking for links between dental amalgams and health problems. To date, the agencies have found no scientific studies that demonstrate dental amalgams harm children or adults. But we continue to review the literature and ask experts their opinions on the safety of dental amalgam.

In September 2006, an advisory panel to the FDA reviewed FDA's research and heard presentations from the public about the benefits and risks of mercury and amalgam. This was a combined panel of the Dental Products Panel from FDA's Center for Devices and Radiological Health (CDRH), and the Peripheral and Central Nervous System Drugs Advisory Committee from FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER).

The panel generally agreed that there is no evidence that dental amalgams cause health problems in the majority of the population. However, the panel did raise concerns about the lack of knowledge concerning the effects of dental amalgam on specific groups, including pregnant women, small children, and people who are especially sensitive to mercury.

The American Dental Association (ADA) takes the same position (<http://www.ada.org/prof/resources/positions/statements/amalgam.asp>):

Dental amalgam (silver filling) is considered a safe, affordable and durable material that has been used to restore the teeth of more than 100 million Americans. It contains a mixture of metals such as silver, copper and tin, in addition to mercury, which binds these components into a hard, stable and safe substance. Dental amalgam has been studied and reviewed extensively, and has established a record of safety and effectiveness.

Issued in late 1997, the FDI World Dental Federation and the World Health Organization consensus statement on dental amalgam stated, "No controlled studies have been published demonstrating systemic adverse effects from amalgam restorations." ...mercury released from amalgam restorations, especially during placement and removal, has not been shown to cause any ... adverse health effects."

Patton, who started the practice, has shared some interesting facts about dental amalgams that I'd like to pass on to you.

First, when she was in dental school and they were learning how to mix and use amalgam fillings, they were told that if they accidentally dropped any amalgam they would have to vacate the room. Then, a HAZMAT team would have to be brought in for clean-up because the stuff posed an environmental hazard. (She had the same question that I have—if this stuff is so toxic that it requires a HAZMAT team to clean it up from the environment, how can you put it in people's mouths?)

Second, she tells me that amalgams are considered hazardous materials and are shipped as such. Old amalgam fillings are considered hazardous waste and have to be dealt with as such. The package even says that the material is toxic and should not be used on children or women who are pregnant or nursing. Now, isn't *that* interesting?

What's even more interesting is that amalgam, according to Dr. Patton, is a very poor material to use for dental fillings. Here's why. Remember the mercury in those thermometers? Mercury was used in thermometers because it expands and contracts dramatically with heat and cold.

So, when you drink or eat something hot, the mercury in the filling expands. This puts pressure against the structure of the tooth and causes very tiny hairline fractures in the tooth. Then, when you eat or drink something cold the filling contracts. This creates a tiny gap between the tooth and the filling that allows bacteria to get in between the filling and the tooth. This means that amalgam fillings don't last as long as composites, which actually bond with the tooth and expand and contract with it.

Dr. Patton says she has no trouble billing insurance for removing amalgam fillings and replacing them because she has never found one that doesn't have decay underneath the filling. She even has a standing offer that if she ever removes a mercury filling and there is no decay underneath it, she will replace it for free. She's never had to replace one for free!

Mercury has been used in medicine for a long time. In the early 1800s, a drug called Calomel, a compound of mercury was used to treat fevers, colds, tuberculosis (they called it consumption) and other acute illnesses. Samuel Thomson, an herbalist of the day, called using mercury and other poisons as medicine, "learned ignorance." I think there's still some "learned ignorance" in our society, when mercury continues to be used in dental amalgams, vaccines and other "health care" applications.

Mercury Detoxification

Even with the removal of my amalgam fillings, it doesn't mean that all the mercury is out of my tissues. In fact, removing the fillings can precipitate a kind of "healing crisis" because it

can mobilize mercury in the tissues as the body tries dumping it. Therefore, it is wise to for anyone who has "silver" fillings or who has recently had one removed, to do a mercury detox.

Here are some things I would recommend for a typical "heavy metal detox" for mercury and other heavy metals.

- 1 Tablespoon of Flax Seed oil or 2 Super Omega-3 EPA twice daily
- 1 Heavy Metal Detox twice daily
- 2-4 Algin three times daily or 1 tablespoon Nature's Three in a glass of water or juice twice daily
- Once or twice a week take a drawing bath with Hydrated Bentonite (1/2 bottle) or a cup of any other fine clay. (I purchase Redmond Clay in 15 lb. boxes.) Another option is to take a foot spa bath. Many NSP Managers now own these devices, which can be very helpful in heavy metal detoxification.

When doing this program, make certain the bowels are moving at least two to three times per day. If not, you may wish to take some LBS II at bedtime or 2 Magnesium Complex twice daily. You may wish to do a general cleanse before starting the heavy metal detox program. This ensures that all eliminative channels are open.

Some optional ingredients you can consider adding to enhance the program include: alpha lipoic acid, N-acetyl-cysteine, hydrated bentonite (internally), Bowel Detox and MegaChel. You may want to muscle test these items to determine if any of them are needed as part of your personal heavy metal detoxification program.

Fluoride Treatments

Fluoride isn't a heavy metal, but it's another substance that dentists use that has a high danger of toxicity and a discussion of dental hazards wouldn't be complete without mentioning it. Dr. Patton says that there are about 100 cases each year of people who die, yes die, from fluoride treatments in the dentist's office. After investigating this issue, her office will not give fluoride treatments. Both their safety and their efficacy are highly questionable.

Fluoride depresses testosterone production and can cause men to grow "breasts." It depresses thyroid function, which affects numerous other body functions, including the ability to burn fat and lose weight. This is another dental hazard I have chosen to avoid. (None of my kids got fluoride treatments.)

Fluoride kicks iodine out of the body, and conversely, increasing one's iodine intake can help the body get rid of fluoride. So, if you've been exposed to fluoride some Liquid Dulse or Black Walnut (or even a professional iodine supplement) may be helpful. See our DVD program on Iodine for more information on this topic.



Kimberly Balas' Clinician's Corner

Summertime Questions

Bee Stings

I got stung by a bee yesterday and soon after made a paste out of Activated Charcoal and rubbed it on the sting area. This morning I found that my hand is slightly swollen. Any recommendations as to what else I can do?

Toni

I would take some Histablock to reduce the allergic reaction and some IF-C to reduce the inflammation. Crushed fresh plantain leaf is another very good remedy for bee stings.

Bug Bite

Last week my down-line manager was bit or stung by a black flying insect. It stung him right on his left eyelid close to the eyelashes. It has been swollen with a hard lump like the stinger is still in there. He has been putting a black salve on it (against my advice) to draw it out. It's hot out, he does not use air conditioning and it drips into his eye and irritates it, just like I said it would. What could I recommend he can use that will not irritate his eyes?

Laura

I use the Intestinal Soothe and Build as a poultice in such a sensitive areas. It doesn't sting and will draw out irritants.

Diffusing Colloidal Silver

I have the Amrita diffuser. Can Colloidal Silver be used in the diffuser? Can I add other oils with the Colloidal Silver or should it be used alone? I was advised to diffuse Colloidal Silver for 10 minutes every hour. Is that the normal recommended time or should I run it longer?

Nolee

It's alright to diffuse the silver and to add essential oils to it, but I wouldn't run it any longer than ten minutes because it can overwhelm the olfactory tract and over stimulate the hypothalamus.

Ear Piercing

My daughter had her ears pierced when she was ten months old and never had a problem. The earrings, I was told then, are 14K gold-plated. She is now 7, and a year ago we noticed that a problem had started. Her ears were sore, and when I took out her earrings, I could see through the hole to the other side! They were runny, and the underside of her lobe was constantly splitting. I kept out the earrings until they healed, which took about two months, and put them in again. The same problem started again.

I have tried Nature's Fresh, probiotics, echinacea/golden seal, and colloidal silver. I waited a year before trying the earrings again. During that time the underside of the lobes still cracked and peeled, and anytime I tried to push a post through, white "goo" would come out. I then went to a jewelry store and bought solid gold post earrings. Not even 24 hours later they had to come out again! Once again her lobes had clear, runny fluid coming from the hole and she complained that they were sore.

I understand that this is not a life or death situation, but there must be something that I'm missing! I should add that a year ago, before I started with a more natural approach, her doctor prescribed antibiotics, to no avail. What could this be, and how do I take care of it once and for all?

JH

It really sounds like a lymphatic problem. I would try some Lymph Drainage for a while and the Lymph Gland Cleanse.

High Altitude Problem

I have a couple of clients who have moved to the mountains and they are having some health issues. They are both tired and have been told it takes about a year to adjust to the high altitude. Their blood tests show low carbon dioxide. Any suggestions?

BR

It can take up to 18 months to acclimate, depending on the level of altitude. The CO₂ is low because a proper exchange isn't being made since the body is trying to take up more oxygen. This affects the baroreceptors.

Selenium is a key element to help with this. The attempt to get more oxygen can cause oxidation to cell membranes and CoQ10 can help with this, but I would use Thai Go or Super Antioxidant instead. Green Tea is good, too. I would also suggest they try GlycoEssentials, as it will help the cells adjust.

Kimberly Balas is a board certified naturopath and clinical nutritionist. She is currently head of the research department and a certified instructor for all Tree of Light courses. She is available for consultations by phone or at her Wyoming office. For more information on scheduling a consult, please phone 307-277-2466.

