

## SAGEBRUSH, COMMON



### *Artemisia tridentata*

[ar-te-MIZ-ee-uh try-den-TAY-ta]

**Family:** Compositae

**Names:** basin sagebrush, common sagebrush, wormwood, blue sagebrush, chamiso hediondo, sagebrush, toothed sagebrush, wormwood, Taos sage, Ts'ah – the sagebrush (Navajo); Basin Big Sagebrush, Big Sagebrush, Chamiso Hediondo, Purple Sage, Chamiso Hediondo

**Description:** a woody evergreen shrub, typically 2-10 feet tall. It has a stubby, branched trunk and a grayish-green bark, which shreds with age, and is topped by a rounded crown. Wedge-shaped leaves, about 1 inch long, have three teeth at the tip and are covered with silvery gray hairs that conserve moisture. The leaves emit a pleasantly pungent aroma. Tiny yellow to whitish flowerheads in September-October grow in dense clusters at the ends of branchlets. Found in dry and sandy soils, on ranges and hillsides. Oregon, Washington, California, Colorado, Nebraska, and Utah. Reported in New England.

**Cultivation:** Requires a sunny position and a well-drained soil that is not too rich. Requires a

lime-free soil. There are a number of subspecies growing in different habitats from deep fertile soils to poor shallow ones. Plants are longer lived, more hardy and more aromatic when they are grown in a poor dry soil. Established plants are very drought tolerant. This species is not hardy in the colder areas of the country, it tolerates temperatures down to between 27 and 22°F. The young growth in spring, even on mature plants, is frost-tender and so it is best to grow the plants in a position sheltered from the early morning sun. The plant is very aromatic, especially after rain. The pollen of this species is one of the main causes of hayfever in N. America. Plants in this genus are notably resistant to honey fungus. Members of this genus are rarely if ever troubled by browsing deer.

Surface sow seed from late winter to early summer in a greenhouse in a very free-draining soil, but making sure that the compost does not dry out. The sub-species *A. tridentata vaseyana* germinates better if given a cool stratification for 30 - 50 days. Other subspecies germinate in 1 - 2 weeks in a warm greenhouse. When large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and grow them on in the greenhouse for their first winter, planting them out in late spring or early summer. Cuttings of half-ripe wood, July/August in a frame. Very slow to root. Division in spring or autumn. Layering. Leaves and branches are harvested as needed. When gathering sagebrush, look for mature plants, strip away leaves and small stems from larger woody stems. Sagebrush is best picked when flowering; tie it in bundles and hang upside down to dry. Stable as long as characteristic scent is present, for up to two years.

**History:** A sprig of the plant was among the more than 2,000 year old remains excavated from Jemez Cave. "Artemisia" named after Artemis, the Roman goddess of chastity, hunting and the moon, also a botanist and a medical researcher who discovered several herbs. Tridentata: three-toothed, referring to the leaves. The American explorer John C. Frémont noted the appearance of sagebrush during his westward journey through what is now Wyoming in 1842, calling it by the name of its European relative absinthe. The settlers who followed soon came to regard its presence as a good omen, since where it grew in abundance the soil was fertile enough to support farming. From prehistoric times, the Indians of the West made use of the treelike shrub. They chewed the leaves of sagebrush to ease stomach gas and used a tea made from the leaves to treat other stomach disorders as well as colds and sore eyes. When settlers arrived they took up some of the native uses of the plant and added their own. Sagebrush preparations were used to treat headache, diarrhea, sore throat, vomiting, and even bullet wounds.

**Constituents:** aromatic oils including camphor, contained in the leaves.

**Properties:** Antirheumatic; Antiseptic; Digestive; Disinfectant; Febrifuge; Ophthalmic; Poultice; Sedative; Skin.

**Medicinal Uses:** a tea made of the leaves has been used to treat headache, stomachache, vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat, and as an antidote for poisoning. It is good for stimulating sweating and breaking fevers. Make a strong batch of hot tea and sip bit by bit, stopping before the gag reflex sets in. This is bad tasting. A little cold tea is a good bitter tonic to stimulate digestion. Some Indians chewed the leaves to ease stomach gas. A wash made of boiled and steeped leaves was used for treating bullet wounds and cuts, to bathe newborn babies, and as a hot poultice in treating rheumatism. A poultice was also placed on the stomach to induce menstruation,

to relieve colic and treat worms. The leaves are boiled in water and the steam inhaled as a decongestant. Warm leaves may be applied to the neck to help a sore throat. The leaves are pungent and have been preferred for making medicine among other sagebrushes. The tea, a powder made from the leaves for dusting, or the herb heated slowly in Vaseline or lard, are all used for disinfecting the skin and inhibiting growth of bacteria and fungi. For sweat baths the moistened branches are thrown on hot rocks. For flu symptoms, a solution made by steeping the leaves in brandy or tequila taken frequently, a small sip at a time.

*Navajo Uses:* It is one of the life medicines. Mixed with another species of sagebrush, it is said to cure headaches by odor alone. When the plant is boiled, it is said to be good for childbirth, indigestion, and constipation; a tea of the stems and leaves is said to cure colds and fevers. The tea is drunk before long hikes or athletic contests to "rid the body of undesirable things." A poultice made from pounded leaves is said to be good for colds, swellings, and tuberculosis or as a liniment for corns. The same medicine is used on animal sores.

*Remedies:*

*Thrush or Candidiasis Tea*

2 tsp common sagebrush root

1 Tbsp pau d'arco bark

1 cup water

Place the above herbs in a glass container and cover with the water; let soak overnight; strain. Take a mouthful at a time, swishing the liquid in your mouth for several minutes before swallowing.

**Cosmetic Uses:** a kind of hair tonic was made with sagebrush and the volatile oil is added as an aromatic to hair rinses

**Ritual Uses:** *Navajo:* In Navajo legend, Coyote gave this tobacco to the Water Monster to calm her after he had stolen her baby. It is used in the Eagle Way, Water Way, Mountaintop Way, and Night Way. Medicine men use sagebrush as the hearth of the

ceremonial fire drill. It is also a sweatbath medication.

Sagebrush is a popular smudge herb, burned in a tied bundle or as dried powder. It cleanses and purifies both metaphysically and physically with its antimicrobial smoke.

**Other Uses:** The branches were often burned to purify the air in a room where a woman had given birth to a child. An infusion of the plant repels insects, it is also disinfectant and so is used for washing walls, floors etc. A yellow to gold dye is obtained from the leaves, buds and stems combined. The fibrous bark is used for weaving mats, baskets, cloth etc., or as a stuffing material in pillows etc and as an insulation in shoes to keep the feet warm. A fiber obtained from the inner bark is used for making paper. The fibers are about 1.3mm long. The stems are harvested in late summer, the leaves removed and the stems steamed until the fiber can be stripped off. The fiber is then cooked for two hours with lye before being ball milled for 4 hours. The resulting paper is a light tan/gold color. A bunch of the leafy stems can be tied together and used as a broom. The shredded bark is a fine tinder for starting fires. The stems make good friction sticks for making fires. The seeds are used during celebrations because, when thrown into a fire, they explode like crackers. Wood - hard, dense. It burns rapidly and well, even when green, and has a pleasant aromatic smell.

**Toxicity:** Contraindicated in pregnancy and during lactation. Not for use with emphysema or bronchiectasis.

**Culinary Uses:** Leaves - cooked. The leaves are used as a condiment and to make a tea. Seed - raw or cooked. It can be roasted then ground into a powder and mixed with water or eaten raw. Some Indians in the Southwest ground the seeds for flour. For a tea, pick fresh young leaves from the tips of the branches, wash them thoroughly to remove all dust, and dry them well. Use a heaping teaspoonful of the crushed leaves for each cup of boiling water and steep 15 minutes or more.

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