



WILD ROSE
College of Herbal Medicine

Cayenne

Capsicum annuum

Native
to North
America



Description & Harvesting: Cayenne is a dark-green annual or short-lived perennial plant, obtaining a height between one half and two meters. The stems are furrowed, branching, and angular. The simple leaves are on medium to long petioles and are usually wrinkled, entire, ovate to oval. The pendulous flowers are white to violet, solitary, arising from the axillary nodes.

Capsicum annuum and the many similar species in this genus are native to Central and South America. Since the appearance of Europeans in the Americas during the 16th century however, *Capsicum* has been introduced to and become naturalized in many different tropical and subtropical environs all over the world. To some extent the botanical classification of Cayenne has been obscured by its relatively rapid introduction into other societies, and the plethora of cultivars that have resulted.

History & Folklore: Archeological evidence uncovered from the Tehuacán Valley site in Mexico indicates that *Capsicum* species were cultivated as early as 4000 BCE, during the Coxcatlan era. Cayenne is first mentioned by the Europeans in the diaries of Chanca, a physician that accompanied Columbus on his second voyage to the West Indies in 1494 CE. Soon after, Portuguese colonists introduced Cayenne into India where it became widely cultivated and used as a food and medicine. From India the use of Cayenne spread into Europe, Asia and Africa, and like other solanaceous foods such as tomato and potato, it has become an important staple the world over.

Other names:

Cayenne, Chili, Chile, Chillies, Chili Pepper, Red Pepper, Red Chili, Tabasco Pepper, African Pepper, Bird Pepper

Family: Solonaceae

Parts Used: fruit, the oil from the seeds

Taste & Energetics:

very pungent, hot, with secondary cooling effect and dry

Actions:

sialagogue
stomachic,
carminative, stimulant,
antispasmodic,
analgesic,
rubifacient, alterative,
astringent,
hemostatic, antiseptic,
emetic



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History & Folklore (continued): The species *C. annuum* includes not only Cayenne or Chili peppers, but non-pungent varieties such as the 'Bell' pepper.

The widespread usage of cayenne in western clinical herbal medicine is in large part due to the pioneering work of Samuel Thomson, through the sale of his patented system of healing to millions of North Americans during the mid-19th century. Cayenne has been used in North America, Europe, China, and in India. It was listed in Gerard (1597), Lewis (1769) and Comfort (1853). It can also be found in Aztec herbals (1552). Cayenne has been used as an Ayurvedic herb for many centuries. The Cherokee and the Navaho-Ramah, are known to have used this plant traditionally. Its stimulant properties were used by the Cherokee while the Navaho used the powder as a means of weaning children.

Today cayenne is grown commercially all over the world, with considerable intermixing between similar species and the various varieties and cultivars. For this reason, the commercial classification of cayenne is not based on botanical criteria but on Scoville 'heat units' (HU), or by determining the capsaicinoid profile by high-pressure liquid chromatography (HPLC).

Medicinal Uses: Cayenne is widely considered by herbalists to be the most potent and safest stimulant known. It has wide application wherever there are symptoms of coldness.

Mixed with water, Cayenne powder is used in any catarrhal affliction as in colds, cough, asthma and urinary catarrh. It should not be used for these conditions if counter-indicated by heat symptoms, such as yellow mucus.

In cases of sore throat, hoarseness or laryngitis, cayenne powder in water makes an effective gargle, although where the pain is acute, Cayenne should not be used. In intermittent or low-grade fever, especially in cases where the tongue and oral cavity are dry, Cayenne is indicated.

In cases of dyspepsia, flatulence and constipation cayenne promotes the digestive secretions and stimulates peristalsis. In the treatment of mucus or bloody diarrhea cayenne is used to relieve bowel spasm and stop bleeding. Many practitioners suggest



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Medicinal Uses (continued): that cayenne is effective in gastric and duodenal ulcer, although this use is best indicated for low-grade, unresolved conditions, rather than in acute cases.

In hemorrhoids, particularly where there is more a sensation of heaviness and congestion rather than burning and irritation, cayenne comes highly recommended.

Cayenne has a strong effect upon the circulation, initially acting upon the heart and the large arteries, followed by a stimulant activity upon the arterioles and then the capillaries. Cayenne won't increase the frequency of the pulse per se, but enhances the power of the pulse wave, indicated in a weak pulse where circulation is enfeebled. It is of utility in cardiovascular disease, in stroke or high blood pressure, but is ill-suited in over-strong (sthenic) people who complain of heat, and whose pulse is strong and large.

Cayenne is indicated in any state of paralysis, particularly in the aged where vitality is weak and the patient complains of chills.

Combined with antispasmodics such as lobelia and scutellaria, cayenne is used as an antispasmodic in the treatment of epilepsy.

Taken internally, cayenne is also indicated in tired, painful muscles, joint stiffness, and coldness in the extremities.

Cayenne is an effective hemostatic and astringent, applied topically as a powder on wounds to arrest bleeding, working rapidly to form a clot and seal off the wound.

The Physiomedical and Eclectic physicians also considered cayenne a useful remedy in menorrhagia, and in particular, hemorrhage after parturition.

Used topically, Cayenne oil, salve or liniment is an important remedy in any kind of pain, inflammation or spasm, not just of the muscles and limbs, but over the abdomen and chest in the treatment of dysentery, pneumonia, pleurisy, peritonitis, and to treat afflictions of the liver, uterus, ovaries, spleen or kidneys. Cayenne exerts its beneficial effects by restoring proper circulation in these areas. Used on unbroken skin, Cayenne will promote a local, transient reddening and sensation of heat, but will not typically



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Medicinal Uses (continued): cause any blistering or serious irritation.

In cluster headaches and migraines, a cayenne salve or liniment can be applied topically several times daily to reduce pain and deplete the stores of substance P. Similarly, a topical cayenne preparation is effective to relieve the pain of diabetic neuropathy, trigeminal neuralgia or post-herpetic neuralgia.

These topical applications are used for the pain of shingles, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, post-herpetic neuralgia, trigeminal neuralgia, diabetic neuropathy, back pain, and postsurgical neuralgias. It is also used topically for prurigo nodularis, HIV-associated neuropathy, and fibromyalgia.

Capsicum is also used to relieve muscle spasms, as a gargle for laryngitis, and as a deterrent to thumb-sucking or nail biting.

Applied locally, Cayenne is of great service in the treatment of indolent ulcers, abscesses, and sores.

Intranasally, capsicum is used for allergic rhinitis, perennial rhinitis, migraine headache, cluster headache, sinonasal polyposis, and sinusitis.

Cayenne may be used both internally and externally, along with antimicrobial agents such as Echinacea, in the treatment of carbuncles, large, staphylococcal infections that form deep, interconnecting subcutaneous pockets.

Cayenne is also an important remedy to stop the process of mortification and gangrene, arresting decomposition and decay through its antiseptic properties, as well, repelling the products of putrefaction.

Throughout the physiomedical literature of the 19th century, cayenne is considered a specific in delirium tremens, an acute and sometimes fatal psychotic reaction caused by the abrupt cessation of alcohol intake in chronic alcoholics. For this purpose cayenne can be given in frequent doses, mixed with warm broth, to allay the cravings for alcohol, combat nausea, and to stimulate the appetite.



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Medicinal Uses (continued): Powdered Cayenne has long been a favourite winter remedy to prevent cold feet and frostbite, sprinkled inside the socks. In the treatment of chilblains, Cayenne tincture can be directly applied to the sores with a piece of cotton until a strong tingling feeling is produced. This should be applied on a daily basis until the sores are gone.

In the treatment of toothache a few drops of Cayenne tincture may be applied directly onto the tooth with a cotton swab.

In homeopathic medicine Cayenne is especially indicated in states of laxity and weakness, with diminished vitality. There is a fear of cold and wind, with a tendency towards aching or jerking muscles. The patient is overweight and somewhat lazy, sentimental, and dislikes being inconvenienced by alterations in routine.

Indications: Flatulent dyspepsia, colic, constipation, gastric ulcer, hemorrhoids, sore throat, subacute or chronic laryngitis, colds and flu, fever, bronchial congestion, cough, asthma, tuberculosis, peripheral circulatory insufficiency, chilblains, neuralgia, pain, headaches, arthritis, rheumatism, cardiovascular disease, stroke prevention, wounds, hemorrhage, menorrhagia, gangrene and mortification, abscess, ulcers, carbuncles.

Contraindications: high fever, gastric irritation or inflammation, acute sensitivity of the throat and lungs, conditions where the skin is hot with a sensation of burning and heat, a large and strong pulse, topical application on mucosal surfaces, pregnancy (use with caution); in very large doses Cayenne will act as an emetic or purgative.

Toxicity: None noted.

Preparations & Dosage:

- Fresh Plant Tincture: 1:2, 95% alcohol, 3-10 gtt.
- Dry Plant Tincture: 1:3, 65% alcohol, 3 gtt – 3.5 mL
- Powder: 50 – 400 mg