

WITCH HAZEL FACT SHEET

WITCH HAZEL

(Hamamelis virginiana)

Family: Hamamelidaceae

Also known as: Spotted Alder, Winterbloom, Snapping Hazelnut

Habitat and description: The witch hazel is native to North America where it grows wild and was long used as medicine by Native Americans before it became known to the white settlers. In Europe it is a common garden plant. It is a deciduous shrub growing up to 3 meters (12 feet) high with smooth grey bark, leaves resembling hazel leaves, and striking yellow flowers that appear from late autumn to February. "Wiche" was an old word English for "bendy", and Hamamelis comes from the Greek word for "resembling an apple tree".

Parts Used: Bark and leaves

Active Constituents: The bark and leaves contain tannins, gallic acid, phytosterol, resin, antioxidants (including proanthocyanidin in the bark), bitters and volatile oil. The bark has a stronger action.

Uses: A decoction of witch hazel bark or leaves has astringent, tonic and soothing properties. It is a great remedy for bruising and to stop bleeding. Useful for internal bleeding, heavy periods, diarrhoea, gum inflammation, and also externally for cuts, wounds and skin inflammation. Traditionally used for painful swellings, tumours, bruises, piles, and varicose veins.

Distilled witch hazel water (made from the twigs) is milder in action than a decoction or tincture, but it is still very useful and cooling for burns, including sunburn, as a facial tonic for puffy eyes, and as a skin cleanser.