

## Boost Cardiovascular Health And Circulation With Butcher's Broom

Butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) is a member of the lily family, and looks a bit like a holly bush with barbed evergreen leaves and bright red berries in the fall. At one time they were collected, tied together and sold to butchers as brooms to sweep out their shops.

The stiff leaves were particularly suitable for cleaning out offal and other waste products from butchered animals and also for scrubbing butcher's blocks. It was also used as a deterrent to rodents with their eyes on the meat! Alternative names are sweet broom, kneeholy and Jew's myrtle, so named because it was used during the Feast of the Tabernacles as one of the 'four species' used in the lulav.

The herb was commonly used in Ancient Greece and Rome, the Greeks using it to reduce swellings of various kinds and the Romans using it to treat varicose veins. It has the same uses today, only the mechanisms are understood better. It has been used for centuries in the Mediterranean area for the treatment of inflammations and problems with the circulation, and the Romans used to mash up the leaves and berries to add to wine, and they also used the roots and rhizome as a medicine by soaking them in wine. Today, it is illegal to use holly as a decoration in Italy, so butcher's broom is used instead.

All parts of the plant are used, including the rhizome, and although it is used as a diuretic, and to control a loss of blood pressure experience by some people on standing up, it is its effect on blood vessels where its main medical benefits lie. Butcher's Broom can strengthen certain portions of blood vessels, and change the flexibility properties of the cell walls.

The result of this is that the vessels are tightened up, which helps to maintain the flow of blood throughout the body, but also renders the cell walls less likely to leak or crack under stress. The result is a reduction in blood leakage from stretched and weakened blood vessels such as those that result in hemorrhoids, and also of conditions caused by weakened valves in the veins such as varicose veins and spider veins.

The blood pressure in the veins is very weak since they are so far away from the heart, the blood having passed through the arteries, through the capillaries and into the veins on its way back to the heart before being pumped to the lungs. When the valves become weakened, particularly in the large veins in the leg, there is little to prevent the blood from coming under the influence of gravity and pooling back down the vein, causing distention and occasional ruptures.

A ruptured varicose vein can be very serious and cause significant blood loss. Weakened valves can also lead to the formation of blood clots, which is itself a very serious condition that eventually blocks the heart or causes a stroke. Not only can butcher's broom strengthen the vein walls and prevent leakage, and also enable them to more easily resist the pressure that can cause them to rupture, but it can also be used to break down blood clots. In fact the herb is used in many European hospitals to prevent the formation of blood clots after surgery.

The active ingredients in the rhizome are saponins that contain the aglycones ruscogenin and neuroscogenin and the associated spirostanol and furostanol glycosides. The receptors that cause vasoconstriction are known as adrenoreceptors, these receptors can be selectively stimulated by butcher's broom extract to tighten the veins and improve the return of blood. When introduced intravenously, butcher's broom was noted to constrict venules (small veins that feed the main veins but not arterioles (the small arteries than feed the capillaries)). Hence blood vessels can be selectively treated, and the effect on isolated blood vessels was enhanced by heating. Many supplements include calcium that helps to strengthen the blood vessel walls.

It is possible, therefore, to target the blood vessels that require constrictive treatment in order that they are strong enough to return blood to the heart rather than leak or distend. However, that is not the only health benefit that butcher's broom provides. It can also be used as a diuretic. It is not a strong diuretic, but is used to relief the swelling of bruises and PMS, the reason given being that since leakage from the blood vessels is lessened, then more fluid is available to pass through the kidneys. There might be other reasons.

It is also use for the treatment of ortho static hypotension, the reduction in blood pressure that some people experience. It is believed that butcher's broom can control this condition without increasing blood pressure, as most other remedies do, and which is almost as undesirable as the condition they are treating.

There are few problems associated with the herb, although few studies have been carried out its use by pregnant women. Although the one test that was carried indicated no effect, it would be wise for pregnant or nursing women not to use it until further studies have been carried out. Due to its effect in tightening blood vessels, its use is not recommended by anybody suffering from high blood pressure (hypertension). Many hypertension treatments are designed to render the blood vessels more elastic rather than constrict them.

In one very small study of pregnant women who used a topical cream containing butcher's broom, no side effects were seen for either the mother or the baby. However, very little information is available on how oral butcher's broom might affect a developing fetus, an infant, or a small child. Therefore, its use is not recommended during pregnancy, while breast-feeding, or during early childhood.

Because it tightens blood vessels, butcher's broom may worsen high blood pressure or benign prostate hyperplasia (BPH). Individuals with either of these conditions should not use any form of butcher's broom without first consulting a doctor. The known side effects have already been stated, and they are fairly mild, but few studies have been made on the herb other than in Europe, and the side effects have not been fully explored. It is unlikely; however, that there are any as yet unknown serious side effects since butcher's broom has been used now for a long time, particularly in Europe.

The term 'ruscogenin' is used for the collective mixture of active saponins in butcher's broom, and many of the supplements are formulated to include from 5 to 15 mg of these. However, check the label, since standardization is not yet required in the USA, and in theory a preparation can include much more or much less ruscogenin. It is frequently supplied with other active ingredients, such as vitamin C or calcium, and perhaps even horse chestnut that affect blood vessels in a similar way. Always follow the instructions on the package, since these are designed for the specific strength of supplement you are using.

### About the Author

More information on [butcher's broom extract](#) is available at VitaNet &reg;, LLC Health Food Store. <http://vitanetonline.com/>

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