

# Ephedra Viridis

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When I first met *Ephedra viridis*, I was certain the plant was in a dormant stage, or possibly dead. The dry spaghetti stalks which pointed skyward from the small bush held not a single stem, leaf, flower nor berry. Just dry sticks. I was hiking in central Utah with Bob (who knows the land well); he set me straight regarding those spaghetti looking sticks.

*Ephedra* (commonly known as Brigham tea) is a perennial evergreen ranging from 1-4 feet tall, and is nearly leafless with slender, cylindrical, yellow-green branches. In August, the miniscule flowers – a magnifying glass comes in handy in order to see them – bear fleshy, red cones.

I was so enchanted by this strange plant that I researched and found it was carefully bundled within a 60,000-year-old Neanderthal grave. I also found *Ephedra* has been revered in Chinese medicine for over 5,000 years and is known as the most effective phlegm mover, as well as a remover of stagnation. A few uses in Chinese medicine include: phlegm, edema, wheezing, cough, asthma. *Ephedra* is often combined with *Zingiber* (Ginger root) and *Glycyrrhiza* (Licorice root).

The Native American tribes in the southwest region of the country use the local *Ephedra viridis* to: purify blood, curb appetite, cleanse kidneys, serve as a laxative, aid in yellow jaundice, gonorrhoea, and topically for snake bites and venereal diseases.

Before I harvested *Ephedra*, I studied different methods and found the Popotillo tribe only harvest when the inside pith is reddish-brown. I followed their advice and found this is indeed more potent than when the inner part is yellow/ivory.

When prepared as tea, old time herbalists and Mormon pioneers felt *Ephedra* should be infused repeatedly as it takes several days of simmering to sufficiently extract all the bioavailable copper and minerals.

*Ephedra* contains large amounts of ephedrine, as well as tannins, flavonoids, glycosides, inulin, starch, pectin, cellulose, saccharides such as glucose, oxalic acid, citric acid, malic acid, fumaric acid and other organic acids.

You may notice that many chemical constituents in *Ephedra* are acids. It is well known that acids break apart things which are stuck in the body, and that pectin binds to what needs to be removed, and that ephedrine moves things. This synergy of these constituents may be the reason for such longevity and reverence in Chinese and Native medicine.

Also, inulin is known to stabilize blood sugar while slowing the release of saccharides, perhaps this helps with steady energy, as opposed to a rapid spike.

I am not a doctor but feel *Ephedra* should be used thoughtfully, on a case by case basis, by those with the following: heart disease, high blood pressure, strokes, seizure disorders, anxiety disorders, during pregnancy, diabetes, thyroid disorders. *Ephedra* is not an adaptogen herb so I suggest use for only short periods of time.

***Shelly Sawyer Jensen** holds a BS in Mathematics and a Masters of Herbology. Shelly's greatest joys are hiking, dancing, singing, learning, writing, laughing with her two fabulous children, and discovering the limitless dimensions of the human heart.*