

# Hawthorn Berry for Your Heart

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Hawthorn berry “haws” have been used to make wine and jelly and to flavor brandy for years, but not many people are aware of the impressive ways this plant has been used as a remedy for heart problems and more
- › Every part of the hawthorn berry, including the flowers, berries, leaves, stems and even the bark, was used to make medicines in ancient Greece and Asia
- › Hawthorn may work as well as heart medications to improve symptoms, including those due to related problems such as high blood pressure, atherosclerosis and arrhythmia
- › Herbalists identify bioflavonoids, proanthocyanidins and other antioxidants as the active ingredients that make hawthorn so effective

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published October 24, 2016.***

A dense bush bearing tiny red berries, hawthorn bushes are common in wooded areas and fence rows across the U.S. and throughout the world. Many parts of the hawthorn (with the botanical name *Crataegus*), including its berries and flowers, have been used by traditional healers for centuries.

Resembling tiny sweet cherries, hawthorn berry “haws” have been used to make wine, jelly and flavored brandy for years, but not many people are aware of the impressive ways it remedies heart problems and many other physical ailments as well.

Increasingly, modern studies are pointing to the hawthorn plant as a valuable therapy for cardiovascular disease (CVD), which the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states is the most prevalent cause of death in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>

Pharmacognosy Review reported:

*"Results recorded from clinical trials, experiences of professionally qualified medical herbalists and the low/negligible incidence of side effects experienced by patients would indicate that Crataegus preparations hold significant potential as a useful remedy in the treatment of CVD."*<sup>2</sup>

## **More About the Hawthorn Plant**

One of the oldest-known medicinal plants, hawthorn was first recorded as good for heart health in the first century by Greek herbalist Dioscorides. Later, Swiss physician Paracelsus (1493–1541) recorded similar observations.<sup>3</sup>

The hawthorn berry bush belongs to the same family of plants as apples and roses, so it's fitting that the fruit is usually brilliant red. Like roses on steroids, the berries are accompanied by long, woody thorns that can do a lot of damage if you're not cautious.

One reason hawthorns are so common is because they send up suckers, so they get larger and more dense as they age. Varieties crossbreed easily. They often grow into hedges as high as 25 feet, bearing small white, pink or red flowers with rose-like petals.

As a food, it was at one time known as the "bread and cheese tree" because the flowers, berries and leaves are all safe to eat, so it was a lifesaver during famines.<sup>4</sup>

Also known as mayblossom, hedgethorn, maybush, mayflower and whitethorn, there are hundreds of hawthorn species, and each has its own set of valuable healing compounds. Every part of the hawthorn bush was used to make medicines in ancient Greece and Asia: the flowers, berries, leaves, stems and even the bark.

Commission E, a branch of the German government that studies and approves herbal treatments, has endorsed the use of hawthorn as an herbal treatment.<sup>5</sup>

## Modern Uses of Hawthorn

Today, botanist, research scientist and author Christopher Hobbs says hawthorn is an official herbal pharmaceutical in Brazil, China, France, Germany, Russia and Switzerland. It's even an ingredient of 213 commercial European herbal formulas, mostly for the treatment of cardiovascular problems.<sup>6</sup>

Herbalists in England, Eastern Europe, Poland and the U.S., as well, use the leaves and flowers from the common hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and English hawthorn (*Crataegus laevigata*), but the entire plant is loaded with valuable phytonutrients. Herbal Supplement Resource notes several active ingredients and how they're used:

*"Hawthorn contains around 1% [to] 2% flavonoids, oligomeric proanthocyanidins (1-3%), saponins, phenolic acids (chlorogenic acid, caffeic acid), 2-(2-Phenylethyl) chromone derivatives (in the flowers, leaves and buds), amine (phenethylamine, metoksyfenetylamin, dopamine, acetylcholine and tyramine) and triterpenes based on ursolic acid and oleanolic acid.*

*Hawthorn is also believed to improve circulation in the arms and legs by reducing resistance in the arteries. This is partly due its ability to inhibit a substance in the body known as angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE).*

*ACE is related to the formation of angiotensin II, a substance that has strong astringent effect on the blood vessels."*<sup>7</sup>

## Studies and Tests on Hawthorn Constituents

A study in 2009 reported that when volunteers took 900 milligrams (mg) per day of hawthorn extract for two months, it was as effective as low doses of captopril, a popular heart medication, particularly in improving symptoms of congestive heart failure.<sup>8</sup>

In tests on hawthorn preparations, Pharmacognosy Review identified bioflavonoids and proanthocyanidins as two of their most important compounds due to their powerful

antioxidant activity; some had more than others:

*"Of 28 fruit pulps tested, the hawthorn pulp (Chinese hawthorn) produced the highest measure of antioxidant activity. A similarly high antioxidant activity in Crataegus aronia, a hawthorn indigenous to Israel, Jordan and the Palestine, has been found."*<sup>9</sup>

Further, epicatechin and hyperoside in hawthorn extracts were found to be significantly more effective than those of established drugs. Herbal Supplement Resource noted:

*"Several double blind tests have shown that patients with early stages of cardiovascular disorders have increased physical endurance and improved cardiac function (as measured by ECG) after using standardized hawthorn extracts for few weeks."*<sup>10</sup>

In addition, hawthorn could be useful for angina, or chest pain caused by decreased oxygen to your heart muscle. A review in 1983 indicated that hawthorn extract could successfully treat patients suffering from angina.

Sixty patients were given either 180 mg extract or a placebo every day for three weeks. Those who took hawthorn showed better blood flow and oxygen supply to the heart in their ECGs, and could train for longer periods without attacks than those taking the placebo.<sup>11</sup>

## Hawthorn Benefits More Than Just Your Heart

Your heart isn't the only part of your body to profit from taking hawthorn berry. It's used as a diuretic, which is commonly needed for symptoms of heart failure. It's reported to be effective in other areas of your body and for other health complaints as well, including:

Gout<sup>12</sup>

Edema (excess fluid)

Diarrhea<sup>13</sup>

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Memory<sup>14</sup>

Insomnia

Kidney disease<sup>15</sup>

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The phytonutrients of the hawthorn plant are the key to the way it helps your heart. It's particularly valuable in the early stages of heart disease, from improving blood flow to the blood vessels around your heart and brain, to increasing tolerance to the heart muscle due to a lack of oxygen.

Related physical problems could also be alleviated, such as high blood pressure, atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat). In fact, taking hawthorn could offset more serious heart disease and postpone prescriptions for stronger heart medications.

The Epoch Times suggested that when looking for a hawthorn supplement, you'll likely get something similar to what researchers found effective in clinical studies with a combination of at least 1.8% vitexin and 10% procyanidins.

## Combining Hawthorn with Supplements for Greater Effect

Hawthorn is sometimes combined with other herbs for heightened effectiveness, according to Herbal Supplement Resource:

- Using hawthorn supplements with [Coenzyme Q10](#) helps curb early stages of heart disease.
- Hawthorn can be combined with ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) to improve blood circulation so more oxygen is transported to your brain.
- Used with garlic (*Allium sativum*) and arnica (*Arnica montana*) Hawthorn helps remedy angina and low blood circulation.
- An herbal tea of hawthorn is said to calm your nerves and induce sleep, especially when used with lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) and St. John's wort.

Recommended dosages of hawthorn are typically 160 to 900 milligrams two or three times a day. You can also use it as an herbal tea from 4 to 5 grams of the dried berries or

1 to 2 grams of the dried leaves and flowers. Liquid extracts are also available, with recommended dosages of 20 to 30 drops in a small glass of water.

As a side note, the effectiveness of hawthorn supplements could be lowered by asthma medications, Viagra, Clonidine (a blood-pressure-lowering drug) and other herbs for your heart.

The People's Pharmacy reports that pregnant women should not take hawthorn.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, hawthorn could increase the effects of heart medications such as digitoxin, so it should not be used with herbs containing cardiac glycosides like fox glove and lily of the valley.<sup>19</sup>

## Sources and References

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- <sup>1</sup> [U.S. CDC, October 25, 2024](#)
- <sup>2, 9</sup> [Pharmacogn Rev. 2010 January-June; 4 \(7\):32-41](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [Phoenix Rises Acupuncture, Hawthorn \(Shan Zha\)](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [The Epoch Times January 28, 2016](#)
- <sup>5</sup> [HerbKnowledge.net, Hawthorn Berry](#)
- <sup>6</sup> [Christopher Hobbs 1998](#)
- <sup>7, 10</sup> [Herbal Supplement Resource 2016](#)
- <sup>8</sup> [Eur J Heart Fail. 2009 October; 11\(10\):990-999](#)
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- <sup>13</sup> [Dr. Weil February 12, 2014](#)
- <sup>14</sup> [Herbs2000 2002-2016](#)
- <sup>15</sup> [NCCIH April 27, 2016](#)
- <sup>16</sup> [Nutrients. 2016 May;8\(5\):283](#)
- <sup>18</sup> [The People's Pharmacy November 28, 2023](#)
- <sup>19</sup> [Leaf, December 05, 2018](#)