

The Health and Beauty Benefits of Eucalyptus Leaves

In our previous post on the health and beauty benefits of eucalyptus essential oil we expanded on that ingredient's benefits in treating a variety of respiratory symptoms due to its high *1,8-cineol* content, which is a natural decongestant and antiseptic—but the leaves of the eucalyptus tree themselves can offer similar benefits. Nearly all parts of the plant have medicinal benefit, including the leaves, bark and roots.

Concentrated, therapeutic essential oil can be derived from the plant (and mixed with a carrier oil for topical application), while the leaves can be dried to make tinctures, steeped to make tea or steamed in the shower to create vapors that help clear up upper respiratory conditions or simply help alleviate cold and flu symptoms.

While it is inadvisable to eat raw eucalyptus leaves, the leaves can be prepared in other ways to safely extract their beneficial compounds. Using eucalyptus leaf herbal infusions and tonics, you can prepare homemade flu and cold remedies to help treat symptoms like chest congestion, cough, and other cold and flu symptoms. You can also apply these topically to your skin, hair or mouth to promote healing and avoid infections.

Eucalyptus leaves come from plants in the genus *Eucalyptus*, which is made up of hundreds of species in the Myrtaceae family that are endemic to Australia. Eucalyptus leaves contain oil glands that produce an essential oil with a woody, camphor-like scent. The plant's volatile essential oils contain a variety of beneficial phytochemical compounds. Many over-the-counter products contain eucalyptus, such as mouthwash, vapor rub, and chewing gum.

Species in the *Eucalyptus* genus grow as trees or shrubs depending on the species, the geography and the climate. The leaves usually start out as light green ovals and become darker green as the plant matures. Most types are evergreens and hold on to their leaves year-round. The eucalyptus tree has a gum-infused bark and long stems.

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1. High in Antioxidants

[Eucalyptus leaves are a great source of antioxidants, particularly flavonoids](#), which protect your body from [oxidative stress](#) and free radical damage. Diets rich in these compounds can protect against certain cancers, heart disease, and dementia. The main flavonoids in eucalyptus include *1,8-cineole* (known as *eucalyptol*), *catechins*, *isorhamnetin*, *luteolin*, *limolen*, *kaempferol*, *phloretin*, and *quercetin*.

These compounds can provide anti-inflammatory effects and support the immune system. They also have analgesic properties that can help reduce toothaches, headaches and joint pain when applied topically. Although you cannot eat fresh, whole eucalyptus leaves, dried leaves can be brewed into tea. Choose a tea that is specifically labeled "eucalyptus leaf tea," and never add eucalyptus essential oil to the tea.

The compound *1,8-cineole* present in these leaves was shown in a [2010 study](#) to have antimicrobial effects against many bacteria, including *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), viruses, and fungi (including *Candida*).

A [large 2012 study](#) comprehensively examined flavonoid classes in relation to cardiovascular disease mortality. The study was comprised of 38,180 men and 60,289 women. Researchers found that a diet high in flavonoids was associated with an 18% lower risk of fatal heart disease. Eucalyptus tea is a good source of antioxidants and flavonoids, and is [generally recognized as safe for adults](#). However, children

are at high risk of eucalyptus toxicity and should get approval from a healthcare professional before drinking eucalyptus tea.

2. Relief from Cough, and Cold and Flu Symptoms

In a [2004 a double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled trial](#), and a [2013 placebo-controlled double-blind trial](#) the *1,8-cineole* in eucalyptus proved a great natural treatment for common respiratory issues, such as cough, sore throat, phlegm, nasal congestion, respiratory infections, bronchitis, headaches stemming from *rhinosinusitis* (sinus pressure), asthma, and symptoms related to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Eucalyptus is a common ingredient in over-the-counter (OTC) cold and cough products. Research has shown that it can loosen mucus and expand the bronchi and bronchioles of your lungs. It is also a natural anti-inflammatory agent.

The main [phytochemical compound responsible for these properties is eucalyptol](#), also known as *1,8-cineole*, found in eucalyptus leaves and essential oil. *Eucalyptol* relieves cold symptoms like cough frequency, nasal congestion, and headache by decreasing inflammation and mucus buildup.

In one [2003 12-week study](#) 32 people with bronchial asthma were given either 600 mg of *eucalyptol* or a placebo every day. Those in the *eucalyptol* group required 36% less medication to control their asthma symptoms, compared with those in the control group, who only required 7% less.

Eucalyptol is also found in many topical decongestants. However, because even small doses of the essential oil of eucalyptus can be toxic, you should avoid ingesting it. Be sure to consult your healthcare provider before using eucalyptus essential oil or changing your medications.

3. Manage Asthma Symptoms

Eucalyptol, a terpene, has been shown to help improve asthma symptoms. In a [2012 double-blind, placebo-controlled, multicenter study](#), 247 patients with asthma were administered 600 mg of *1,8-cineole*, or a placebo daily, over a period of 6 months. The group taking *eucalyptol* experienced a decreased need for steroid medications used to control their symptoms, significantly more so than the placebo group.

Researchers involved in a [2020 study](#) credit the notable improvement in lung function and health condition as well as reduced dyspnea in asthma patients to the anti-inflammatory effects of *1,8-cineole*. This compound has been found to suppress *arachidonic acid* metabolism and *cytokine* production, two factors that exacerbate severe asthma.

4. Provide Pain Relief

Simply inhaling eucalyptus may decrease pain. Eucalyptus contains many anti-inflammatory compounds, like *1,8-cineole* and *limonene*, which act as pain relievers.

A [3-day study in 2013](#) consisting of 52 people who had undergone knee replacement surgery found that inhaling eucalyptus essential oil diluted in sweet almond oil for 30 minutes daily significantly decreased pain and blood pressure levels, as compared with inhaling pure sweet almond oil.

However, another [study in 2019](#) consisting of 123 cancer patients found no significant differences in pain between the control group and the group inhaling eucalyptus essential oil for 3 minutes prior to a medical procedure. Further randomized controlled trials are needed to validate this study.

5. Healthy Skin Care

Using eucalyptus may improve dry skin. In a [2011 study](#), a eucalyptus extract demonstrated an increase in the level of ceramide production in human keratinocytes. Ceramides are a type of fatty acid in your skin that's responsible for maintaining its barrier and retaining its moisture. Researchers believe these results indicate the possibility that *macrocarpal A* in the eucalyptus extract is the key component that stimulates the synthesis of ceramide in the skin.

In a [2018 study](#) consisting of 34 patients found that the topical application of a lotion containing eucalyptus extract and a synthetic ceramide to participants' scalps daily for four weeks significantly improved the skin dryness, scaling, itchiness and erythema in all patients. Symptoms associated with *atopic dermatitis*, *seborrheic dermatitis* or *pityriasis capitis*.

6. Improve & Maintain Oral Health

Eucalyptus can improve periodontal health by having antimicrobial effects against many bacteria, which is why it is sometimes added to mouthwash and gum to help prevent plaque buildup and reduce bleeding. The *1,8-cineol* compound [helps control the inflammation and bacteria growth](#) that contribute to gum disease. Eucalyptus leaves contain high amounts of *ethanol* and *macrocarpal C*—a type of *polyphenol*. These compounds are associated with killing the bacteria that can cause cavities and gum disease.

In a [2008 double-masked, randomized trial](#), eucalyptus extract was found to possess antibacterial activity against *cariogenic* and *periodontopathic* bacteria. Groups chewed gum with eucalyptus extract in high-concentration, low-concentration, and a placebo for 12 weeks. The low- and high-concentration groups exhibited statistically significant improvements compared to the placebo group in plaque buildup, gum bleeding and gum inflammation.

7. Natural Insect Repellent

Eucalyptus can directly act as a natural insect repellent to provide protection against mosquitoes and other harmful arthropods. The [pesticidal activity of eucalyptus oil](#) is due to the components such as *1,8-cineole*, *citronellal*, *citronellol*, *citronellyl acetate*, *p-cymene*, *eucamalol*, *limonene*, *linalool*, *α-pinene*, *γ-terpinene*, *α-terpineol*.

The [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) lists oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE)—derived from a tree which is actually not the same *Eucalyptus* family—as an approved and powerful insect repellent. OLE is effective at warding off mosquitoes and other biting insects for up to eight hours after topical application.

Reportedly, the essential oils from *E. globulus* and its major monoterpene *1,8-cineole* showed toxicity against human head lice, *Pediculus humanus capitis* (Yang et al. 2004). In a [2017 randomized controlled trial](#), eucalyptus essential oil was found to be more than twice as effective in curing head lice infestation as a neurotoxic treatment mousse.

In a [2015 systematic review](#), few research clinical trials were available to show whether eucalyptus essential oil is effective at eradicating head lice compared with other treatments. Efficacy is likely to depend upon the extracts used and the mode of action.

8. Promote Relaxation

The warm, woody scent of *eucalyptol* contained in eucalyptus leaves and essential oil has been shown to lower stress and anxiety. In a [2014 randomized clinical trial](#), 62 patients undergoing selective nerve root block experienced a significant reduction in preoperative anxiety after inhaling eucalyptus. Inhaling eucalyptus was also shown to lower blood pressure in the patients after the surgery.

How to Dry Fresh Leaves

You can dry the leaves on the stem by hanging the branches upside down in a dry place in your home. An alternative is to remove the leaves from the stem and dry them on your counter on a paper towel. You'll know the leaves are dried once they have a crispy or "leathery" appearance. Store them in an airtight glass jar to keep them fresh.

The Shelf Life of Eucalyptus Leaves

Fresh leaves should be used within 3–8 weeks. Dried, preserved leaves last for as long as 1–2 years if stored in an airtight container.

How to Use Eucalyptus Leaves

Eucalyptus leaves are found in a wide variety of products, including cough drops, beauty products, herbal teas, candles and potpourri. To make your own eucalyptus salves, cough drops and other remedies, you can first create a tincture or "herbal infusion" by steeping the leaves. See below for instructions on how to do this.

Using the Eucalyptus Leaves Whole

Hang the leaves on their stem in your shower, or add them directly to your bath water. The steam will help release the beneficial compounds for relief from cold and flu symptoms, chest congestion or simply for a relaxing spa-like experience.

You can also add some to a bowl of or fill your bathroom sink with hot water, bend over the bowl/sink so your face is hovering above the water, drape a bath towel over your head and shoulders (this will keep the steam near your face), and inhale the vapors coming off.

Buying and Storage of Eucalyptus Leaves

In terms of where to buy eucalyptus leaves, look in health food stores, some gardening stores or online. You can also easily grow this plant yourself at home (see below), either indoors or outdoors.

Growing Your Own Eucalyptus Tree

Eucalyptus plants can be grown at home as a potted shrub, indoors or outdoors, depending on the species. It grows best in temperate or cool climates outdoors and should be brought inside when the outdoor temperature drops below 50°F.

These plants are considered "heavy feeders" and need lots of sun exposure. They grow well in a variety of soils as long as they are watered and fertilized often, and receive lots of sunlight.

Make a Eucalyptus Leaf Herbal Infusion

Eucalyptus leaves can be found online whole fresh, dried or crushed and ground up in tea bags. An herbal infusion is like "a cup of tea without the tea leaves." It's basically a liquid that contains the nutrients released from herbs once they are soaked and allowed to steep. To make an herbal infusion using eucalyptus leaves, add a handful of fresh leaves to hot water in a glass jar, and let it sit for about eight hours. Then remove the leaves, and drink the water. You can also use this liquid on your skin to help soothe irritation, or as a face wash for its cleansing effects.

Make a Eucalyptus Leaf Tincture

To make a tincture, put about 8–12 oz. of fresh leaves into a large jar and cover with vodka. Seal the jar, and leave it at room temperature in a cool, dry place for two weeks, then strain. Store the tincture in an airtight jar in a cool, dry place. It should keep for several months.

Make a Eucalyptus Leaf Tea

Another way to use the leaves fresh is by brewing them to make an herbal tea, which is a great way to ingest the beneficial compounds in a safe way. Add several fresh leaves or ½ teaspoon of crushed dried leaves to boiling filtered or distilled water, and let steep for several minutes. Then strain out the leaves, let the liquid cool a bit, and drink. You can also stir a bit of honey or a squeeze of fresh lemon juice.

Here are some other homemade recipes you can make at home using eucalyptus leaves whole, fresh or dried:

1. **Herbal Chest Rub**—first make a tincture with the leaves and then combine it with beeswax and coconut oil, then spread over your chest to help ease congestion.
2. **Skin Salve**—first make a tincture with the leaves, add it to a carrier oil together with calendula, then massage over any dry patches of skin (just avoid applying it to open wounds).
3. **Massage Oil**—you can also make a massage oil to help alleviate joint pain, swelling and arthritis. Fill a glass jar with a handful of fresh or dried leaves, then cover with olive, fractionated coconut, jojoba or sweet almond oil. Place the jar with the oil and leaves under direct sunlight for two weeks, strain, and then it is ready to apply to the skin.
4. **Homemade Cough Drops**— first make a eucalyptus tea or herbal infusion, then freeze it using a cough drop tray or silicone gummy candy mold. You can also use ice cube trays but then you'll have to chop the ice cubes into smaller pieces before using the cough drops.

Precautions

Avoid ingesting eucalyptus essential oil or eucalyptus leaves whole and raw. Doing so can be harmful since the *1,8-cineol* content in them is highly concentrated. This phytochemical compound is only safe in minute quantities. Instead, steep them into a tea first, then drink the tea.

Eucalyptus leaves (or the *1,8-cineol* contained in them) can rise above therapeutic levels if ingested too frequently or in large quantities and become toxic. *Eucalyptol* toxicity can manifest in the following symptoms: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and even neurological impairment.