

# Skullcap

**Botanical name:** *Scutellaria lateriflora*, *S. brittonii*, *S. galericulata*, *S. nana*

**Family:** Lamiaceae

**Family Key words:** "Square stalk and opposite leaves. Usually aromatic"

**Common name:** Blue skullcap, Mad-dog skullcap, mad weed

**Habitat and Range:** Skullcap is native to North America and can be found through the continent although it is becoming endangered and more dispersed in the west. It is currently on the watch list in California and Utah. It is a perennial herbaceous plant that prefer full sun to moderate shade. It loves water therefore is found near mountain streams, creeks, marshes meadows and washes. In the southwest it is often growing with willow and other mints.

**Botanical description:** In appearance it resembles other mints with a square stem and opposite leaves only a bit smaller than most in its family. It grows upright and its flowers ranges from purple to blue and pink to white flowers grow from the axis of its leaves in the upper portion of the plant.

**Parts used:** Aerial parts when in flower

**Harvesting and Processing:** There are over 100 species of skullcap and although many are medicinal they are not interchangeable. Harvest the above ground parts from when it begins to flower until it is in full bloom but not after it has gone to seed. Cut at least 3 inches above the ground so you don't kill the plant. Hang in small bundles or dry on a screen. Once leaves will fall off easily and you can chop up the stem. Store in a sealed container for up to one year. Fresh plant tincture is far better than dried.

**Therapeutic Preparation:** Fresh plant tincture with 95% alcohol, infusion, herbal smoke, infused oil

Infusion for sleep: 5 grams skullcap in 8oz water steep 15-20 minutes

**Energetics and taste:** Cool, bitter

**Medicinal Actions:** nervine, sedative, antispasmodic, anticonvulsant, hypotensive

**Indications:**

- Skullcap is a wonderful tonic for the whole nervous system. A nervous system trophorestorative. It is high in calcium, magnesium and potassium which add to its strengthening and calming actions. It is used with chronic or acute nervous disorders such as nervousness, restlessness, anxiety, muscle tension, PMS, insomnia, irritability, stress, worry and other nervous disorders because it promotes a calm and peaceful mind. It relaxes without causing drowsiness.

- As a bitter nervine it is used in conditions that arise from a stagnant liver and liver heat such as anger, fear, depression, anxiety, insomnia, restless sleep and restlessness. The bitter action enters through the heart and supports heart qi.
- It helps move energy that is stuck due to over-exhaustion and stress.
- It has the ability to calm and lift the spirit and is used to treat issues that lead to depression such as worry, apprehension, preoccupation. It aides in meditation and promotes clarity. It can cool down hot emotions like jealousy, anger, hatred and irritability.
- It is used to break addictions and to ease drug and alcohol withdrawal. Usually used in a formula with Milky oats (and other appropriate nervines) for this purpose.
- It is great for chronic and acute anxiety or anxiety attacks and is especially indicated when the anxiety is accompanied by muscle spasms, twitching or tremors.
- It has antispasmodic properties and is used to treat epilepsy and convulsions ,Parkinson's, restless leg, TMJ and menstrual cramps.
- As a pain reliever it is a good remedy for nervous headaches and can be taken for migraines.
- Taken daily it can help relieve nervous exhaustion.
- A strong infusion taken before bed it will promote a deep restful sleep and is a good addition to a dream pillow. It relaxes the overactive or "busy" mind and helps stop circular thinking.
- It has an affinity for the peripheral nervous system and is good for people who experience the world with an uncomfortable intensity.
- It is good for over-thinkers as it calms the spirit and clears the mind. Helps people not dwell on thing too much.
- It is good for the digestive system, relieving gas and bloating especially griping and colic type spasm.
- It is being used to treat ADD

**Contraindication:**

Do not take during pregnancy

**Other uses:**

- Not to be confused with Chinese skullcap (*Scutellaria baicalensis*) is used to clear heat especially in the upper body. Good for fevers, thirst, cough with thick yellow mucus, jaundice, and other hot conditions. A powerful anti-inflammatory. The root is used instead of the leaves.
- Historically *Scutellaria lateriflora* was used to treat rabies hence its common name of mad dog weed but it is no longer used in this way.

Resources used to compile these notes and accompanying presentation:

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Wood, Mathew, *The Earthwise Herbal A complete guide to New World Medicinal Plants*