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Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum* spp)

(Herbal Monograph by Deborah Savarese, December 2018)

Phylum - Angiosperm

Class - Monocot

Family – Asparagaceae (Formally Liliaceae)

Genus

Polygonatum
(for “many angled” or ancient Greek for “many knees”)

Species/Botanical Name

There are over 70 species, including *P. biflorum*, *multiflorum*, *odoratum*, *millefolium*, *Siberian*, being among the most common.

Other Common Names

“Lady's Seals, St. Mary's Seal, *Sigillum Sanctae Mariae*, (French) *Scean de Solomon*, (German) *Weusswurz*.” [20]
(Sanskrit) “Coiling leaf *Polygonatum*, *Mahameda*, *Tridanti*, *Devamani*” [23], (TCM) “*Yu Zhu*” [1]



[4]



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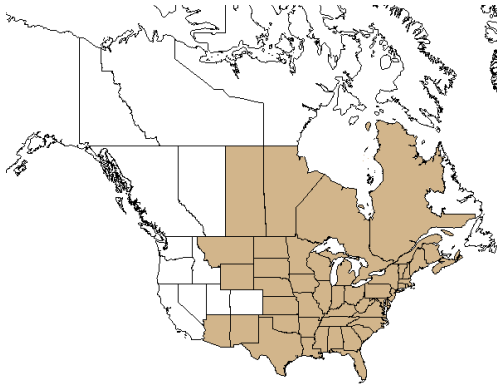


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Native region, Geographical distribution, Global use



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The traditional use of Polygonatum in the treatment of diabetes was first observed in 1930 by Hedwig Langecker. After experiments, she concluded that it was effective in fighting nutritional hyperglycemia, though not that caused by adrenaline release, probably due to its glucokinase content. [16]

Habitat, How to Grow, Duration

A hardy woodland perennial, Solomon's Seal is native to North America, Europe, & Asia, depending on species, and prefers moist, well drained, shady areas.

In North America, roots are best transplanted in the fall and may take 2-4 years for a full blooming plant to develop, which occurs in late spring and early summer.

P. verticillatum is used in Ayurveda as an aphrodisiac. [6] It is also used to treat pain, fever, inflammation, allergy, and weakness. [7]



[18]



[18]

An herbal remedy called rhizoma polygonati is a mix of Polygonatum species used in traditional Chinese medicine. It is supposed to strengthen various organs and enhance the qi. [28] Polygonatum is believed to be restorative to mental vitality, especially when the mind has been overworked, overstressed, or is in a state of exhaustion. [25]

Harvesting guidelines

Herbalist jim mcdonald gives a detailed description of sustainable harvesting on his website. Here is the condensed version:

"Find a plant and trace down the stem till you feel the root in the soil." "The front of the root will have the bud of the next year's growth, while the back can reach upwards of a foot behind the stem. Trace back two to three inches from the stem and sever the rear portion of the rhizome." "It will be a creamy white color, and appear to have knobby knuckles indicating the previous year's stalks." [9]

"Because the growing portion of the plant is never removed from the ground, plants harvested in this manner show no signs of impact or distress, and will continue to grow unimpeded by harvesting."

"Collected in this manner, you'll have more plants growing where you harvest than were there when you started." [9]



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Identification characteristics, potential look alike, and differences between them

False Solomon's Seal (*Smilacina Racemosa* or *Maianthemum racemosum*, also in the Asparagaceae family)

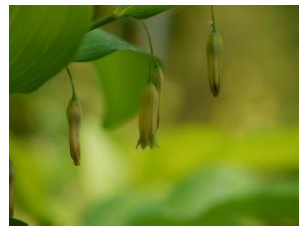
"Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum* spp.) and False Solomon's seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*) are [both] native woodland plants. Both plants produce long, arching stems. However, the flowering and fruiting characteristics are different." [26]

True Solomon's Seal

"Solomon's seal produces bell-shaped, yellowish green to greenish white flowers in May or June. The flowers hang down in clusters from the leaf axils. The flowers are followed by marble-size berries which turn dark blue in late summer." [26]



[2]



[2]

"Once established, Solomon's seal slowly spreads out and creates a nodding blanket of foliage that turns a golden yellow in autumn." [5]



[14]

False Solomon's Seal

"False Solomon's seal produces creamy white flowers in fluffy clusters at the ends of the stems in spring. After flowering, small, pea-size berries develop that turn ruby red in late summer." [26]



[2]



[2]

"Solomon's seal and false Solomon's seal grow best in moist, well-drained soils in partial to heavy shade." [26]



[3]

Constituents & Nutrients

Steroidal saponins, glycosides, polysaccharides, alkaloids, anthraquinones, flavonoids, asparagine, allantoin, convallarin. As stated in Mrs. Grieve's Modern Herbal, "The rhizome and herb contain Convallarin, one of the active constituents of Lily-of-the-Valley, also Asparagin, gum, sugar, starch and pectin." [20]



[18]

FH Herbal Energetics, Actions, Plant Properties, & Taste

Energetics: Cooling, moistening, mildly relaxant
 Actions: demulcent, mild astringent/tonic
 Uses: nutritive, anti-inflammatory, lubricates joints, expectorant, reproductive tonic [24]
 Taste: nutty, sweet, earthy



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Plant Parts Used

Multiple jointed Rhizome/Roots



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Plant Preparation

Methods

Tinctured fresh or dry
Infused in oil for topical use



[18]

Infusions/Decoctions [24]

Capsules



[18]

“The rhizomes are collected in the fall, dried for use by decoction or extracted fresh in alcohol. A high proof alcohol has to be used, since the sticky roots cause a sweet syrup if extracted in a low proof sweet alcohol like brandy. They can also be extracted in rubbing alcohol (add Apios for extra effect, Native American formula).

Dose: external or internal use in small to large amount.” [27]

Although a root, an infusion can be done with ½ t. of Solomon’s Seal in 6-10 oz. of H2O, steeped for 7-10 minutes, covered. [22]

If more of the demulcent qualities desired from Solomon’s Seal, a cold infusion can be done overnight. Place 2 TB in a quart size jar and steep overnight. Store in the frig, drink within 1-2 days. [22]

Since Solomon’s Seal can be costly and hard to find in certain areas, plus being that the root is the part harvested, use of the tincture is preferable over infusion/decoction. These quicker methods should be reserved for more immediate situations while waiting on a tincture to steep.

Plant Uses/Indications (published research and traditional uses)



[19]

Historically, indigenous cultures of North America consumed the starchy rhizomes of Solomon’s seal as a potato-like food to make breads and soups. The young shoots are also edible, raw or boiled for an asparagus-like food. The plant gets its name from a scar that develops on the rhizome in the fall that resembles the ancient seal of King Solomon. [10]



[11]

It should be noted that Solomon’s Seal “contains small amounts of cardiac glycosides, like its cousin *Convallaria majalis* (lily of the valley), but not enough to make it a toxic plant. Indeed, it was an important article of the American Indian diet and remains today a trail food.” [27]



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Contraindications (medications, life stages, health issues, Special considerations, etc.)

Other considerations to be aware of before using Solomon's Seal would be any blood pressure or blood sugar related issues.

According to the works of Matthew Wood, "modern research shows that it can be used to bring down high blood pressure, protect the liver, treat fatty liver, reduce blood sugar levels, and blood fat (Lu, 1994, 203)." [27]

Anyone on medications for any of these issues, especially blood sugar related, should be mindful of the actions of Solomon's Seal, and work with their doctor very closely to monitor and adjust medications when appropriate.

Other Contra-indications:

The berries are considered toxic. [27]



[8]

Although Solomon's Seal has many uses in herbalism, including lung and heart health, as well as some skin and female issues, it is perhaps best known and best utilized for its trophorestorative action on the musculoskeletal system.

In a summary from his text "Medicine for the People", jim mcdonald states "I have found Solomon's Seal to be, without a doubt, among the most valuable herbs for addressing joint injuries of all kinds. Solomon's Seal seems to have a remarkable ability to restore proper lubrication in the joints, and I believe also helps restore pliancy to tendons and ligaments by supplying moisture to them if they are atrophied." "I have frequently seen and experienced Solomon's Seal completely resolve that sensation of friction, grinding, or clicking in joints, and on a number of occasions see this result within a few minutes of a single dose of tincture." "Solomon's Seal seems to act as an anti-inflammatory on almost all of the connective tissues," "this end being achieved by restoring proper lubrication, which both supplements the deficiency and acts protectively to reduce friction on the tissues." [17]

Dosing strategies & Recipes

According to jim mcdonald, "small doses of tincture work quite well; I tend to use 5-10 drops, though Matthew Wood, from whom I learned about this plant, uses 3-5." [17]

I have also personally found using both the tincture and a topical preparation simultaneously, so as to 'hit it from all angles' so to speak, to be quite effective.



[18]

Although the original source of where this quote was first cited on the internet could not be located, it makes for the most appropriate tribute and ending of this document.

I have finally come to view Solomon's Seal as the single most reliable, useful and foolproof remedy that I have ever come across. **Matthew Wood — herbalist, author, teacher**



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