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Devil's Claw

Botanical name: *Harpagophytum procumbens*

Family: Pedaliaceae

Part used: the root (rhizome)

Systems affected: structural, immune, digestive

Devil's claw is a perennial shrub that grows wild in the desert countries of southern Africa, particularly in Namibia. After heavy rain it has red-violet trumpet-shaped flowers. Its name comes from the claw like shape of its root which is harvested at the end of the rainy season.

Devil's claw plant signature is much like a gnarled hand which shows its affinity to arthritis; its botanical name comes from the Greek "harpago" meaning grappling hook.

It can help to relieve pain and, in some cases, improve mobility for those suffering from osteoarthritis and degenerative rheumatism.

Reported research does not explain exactly how it works but shows the presence of a glycoside called harpagoside that reduces inflammation in the joints, and the plant sterols found in the roots are thought to be the cause.

Devil's claw is used to relieve pain during childbirth in Africa, and in Europe it is widely used to treat the pain and inflammation of arthritis and rheumatism. It stimulates digestion, is analgesic and is considered by herbalists to be one of the most useful blood purifiers. It promotes digestion, especially of fats, and helps to remove toxins from the lymphatic system, pancreas, blood, kidneys and liver.

Some common and traditional arthritis formulas pair Devil's claw with valerian root, white willow bark, meadowsweet, and celery seed.

For musculoskeletal conditions, I have found that Devil's claw works synergistically with herbs and/or whole foods that are high in vitamin C, which is essential

for the repair and strength of the connective tissues. Whether preventative or healing action is needed, it's important to keep the connective tissue supple with fluidity to protect the joints. While Devil's claw is working to keep inflammation at bay, the absorbable whole food derived (not synthetic) types of vitamin C can strengthen and support collagenous tissue. Vitamin C is a catalyst for bones, tissues and cartilage to heal properly.

For older dogs with moderate to severe osteoarthritis or younger dogs with the onset of dysplasia, adding *Boswellia serrata* and Solomon's Seal to the Devil's claw root, along with a whole food source of vitamin C (found in certain raw fruits and their extracts), can be helpful to prevent further deterioration as well as quiet the inflammation and ease the pain of the current condition. As always, synergy in a compound formula will often give better results than a single herb.

Devil's claw can take up to four weeks for a noticeable result in advanced cases of arthritis but is considered very safe for long term use in low to moderate doses. For a 50 lb dog use 200 to 300 mg of extract or ½ to 1 tsp of pure powdered root, twice daily.

Devil's claw is very high in magnesium, cobalt, aluminum, iron, manganese, niacin and zinc.



Joyce Belcher is an herbalist/formulator of pet supplements and herbal medicinals for veterinarians and is the founder of Herbs for Life Inc. She lives in York, Maine with her husband, two dogs and two cats; they are all rescues. Visit Joyce at petwellnessblends.com

Devil's claw can also be used topically in the form of a gel or infused oil massaged into the area of pain two to three times a day in mild cases, or in addition to an extract or powder in more severe cases.

Cautions: Devil's claw has specific contraindications that are not to be taken lightly. It should not be used with any animal that has or may have peptic or duodenal ulcers or gallbladder issues as it promotes the secretion of digestive juices, which can cause high levels of pain. If you feel your dog may have ulcers, consult your veterinarian before using Devil's claw. It is not for use during pregnancy. 🐾

