

Hawthorn--*Crataegus oxyacantha* or *C. monogyna*

by Karen Unruh

Hawthorn is a wonderful tonic herb for a healthy heart, and a healthy heart helps us to enjoy a long and productive life. The flowers, berries, tips of branches and leaves nourish, strengthen, and tone the heart muscle and its blood vessels. As a tonic herb, it has the amazing ability to either stimulate or depress the heart's activity as needed.

Serious heart ailments must be treated by a medical practitioner. Hawthorn can be used beneficially in combination with heart medication and, if you decide to do so, consult with your doctor.

Here are some of the ways that hawthorn can keep our hearts healthy:

*Hawthorn berries are rich in antioxidants that can circulate in the blood stream and neutralize free radicals, thus rendering them unable to destroy healthy tissue in the circulatory system and in the heart.

*When heart pains or high blood pressure have you heading to the doctor, this is a sign that blood supply to the heart is either deficient or excessive and that the heart does not have enough oxygen. Hawthorn can gently remedy all, given an adequate period of time. Hawthorn will dilate blood vessels to allow for more flow and will clear blockage of any blood vessel, allowing the flow to settle back to normal. Thus hawthorn will normalize blood pressure, whether it is high or low. This is the tonic nature of hawthorn. Using hawthorn often and regularly will do this over time.

*If circulation to the hands and feet, or varicose veins are a concern, hawthorn will increase circulation to all areas of the body and help to normalize the blood flow and clear the veins.

Of course, care of our heart involves eating healthy food, getting fresh air and exercise, and having close friends and family that nourish and fill the heart. Loneliness of spirit can also be an underlying cause of heart disease. Using hawthorn as a daily tonic can help to boost that spirit with its rosy red colour and gentle taste. I will share with you a way to make a hawthorn glycerite a tonic I know you will enjoy. As well, the hawthorn berries can be used in a decoction which I will also explain.

I enjoyed taking the picture of hawthorn berries at Garden Club member, Babs Moore's home as I purchase eggs from her. Another area of hawthorn trees is along Jingle Pot Road from the Island Highway into Nanaimo. You will see their red berries at this time of year. A large number of trees line the fields behind the new Ice Arena where I have been able to pick berries in the past.

Hawthorn glycerite

This is a method to extract the herbal components of the hawthorn berries. The resulting glycerite is a non-sugar syrup, though sweet, as the vegetable glycerine used comes from coconuts. I purchase Pure Kosher Vegetable Glycerine from Naked Naturals in Parksville.

The method to prepare the glycerite is similar to the boiling water bath method of canning fruit. There are specific weight to volume measures used when reference is made to a book such as 'The Herbal Medicine-Maker's Handbook' by James Green. I have simplified this with measurements that work for me for this recipe.

Ingredients: Ripe hawthorn berries, vegetable glycerine, and water.

Supplies: Pint canning jars, lids and screw tops, canning kettle with a lid, a rack to hold pints off the bottom of the kettle.

Process:

1. Wash berries, remove stems and fill sterilized jars 1/2 full with berries.
2. Dilute glycerine with water. Use three parts glycerine and add 1 part water. Stir gently. Amounts will depend on the number of pint jars you are making and you can make more as needed. Pour diluted glycerine into pint jars over the berries, and as with canning, leave a 1/2-inch air space at the top and wipe jar edges clean.
3. Put new canning lids in boiling water to sterilize, and top the jars with lids, using a screw top band to secure until snug.
4. Place jars in a water bath and slowly bring the water to a slow boil--my canner can be filled so water is half way covering the jars, and this works fine. Let simmer for 1 and 1/2 hours. Yes, the time is correct--it takes time to extract the herbal constituents from the berries.
5. Remove jars cautiously from the boiling water and set on a rack to cool. You will hear the sound of jar lids sealing.
6. Hawthorn glycerite can be kept for years in sealed jars. To use, open and strain the liquid through a jelly bag. Store liquid in the fridge, although I have stored the liquid at room temperature in a dark cupboard with no sign of spoilage.
7. USE! Sip one tablespoon three times a day. Remember, often and regular dosage is how hawthorn works.

Hawthorn decoction

Decoctions are made when using berries, stems, or roots that are harder than leaves and flowers. They need time in boiling water to extract the herbal constituents. Of course an infusion can be made of the flowers or leaves when the berries are not available.

Gently simmer 2 heaped teaspoons of hawthorn berries in a cup of water for 2 minutes. Strain. Add a little honey if you wish. Drink 1/2 to 1 cup, three times a day.

