Ayurveda is a system of traditional medicine native to India subcontinent and a form of alternative medicine. The vast field of ayurvedic science is gaining more importance and popularity across the globe because of its amazing therapeutic values. Many medication commonly used by us today come from plants. In ayurveda, *Taxus baccata* is one of the important plant used for medicinal purpose. *Taxus baccata*, although native to Britain, is also found across much of Europe, Western Asia and north Africa. *Taxus baccata* Linn belonging to *Taxaceae* family. *Taxus baccata* tree is a highly toxic plant that has occasionally been used medicinally. An alkaloid taxin has been obtained from the seeds of the plant and has anti-cancerous property. Leaves contain volatile oil, tannic acid, gallic acid and resinous substance, hence it have been used as a medicine in treating cancers of ovaries and breast. Plant also contain some other useful chemicals like tannic acid, gallic acid, volatile oil and resinous substance, hence it have been used as a medicine to treat asthma, bronchitis, hiccup indigestion, rheumatism, epilepsy.

**VERNACULAR NAMES**


*Shtauneyaka, barhibarha, sukabarha, kukkura, sirnaromasuka, sukapuspha and sukachada* are its names.

**CLASSICAL REFERENCE**

**Charak**

This plant is mentioned in Agurvadi taila (c.ch.3), Mritsanjivan agada (c.ch.23), Bala taila (c.ch.28) and Pradata modak (c.kalpa.1) formulations of charak samhita.

**Sushruta**

Sushruta described it under Aailadigana (s.su.38).4. **Description of Taxus baccata in nighantu**

Bhayprakash and Shaligram nighantu described it under karpuradi varga, Dhanwantri nighantu included it under chandanadi varga, Nighantu Adarsh described it under devdarvadi varga, Priya nighantu mentioned it under Sharadi varga.

**BOTANICAL DESCRIPTION**

*Taxus baccata* is an evergreen, under storey tree to 30m tall, with a spreading crown. It tends to be forked, fluted with depressions at branch stem junctions. Branches are ascending to drooping with twigs irregularly alternate, green or yellow-green when young, reddish brown with age.
The BARK is reddish grey or reddish brown, thin smooth, peeling off in longitudinal narrow shreds.

LEAVES in to 2rows, needle like, 1.5-2.8 by 0.2-2.5cm, usually curved, acuminate. Margins, slightly in rolled, dark-green and shining above, brownish-yellow and somewhat pale beneath, single nerved and narrowing into a short petiole.

FLOWERS inconspicuous, yellowish with female blooms on small flaky handles.

SEED hard, surrounded by a red fleshy aril, looking like a berry, about 7mm in diameter.

DISTRIBUTION
Taxus baccata is a conifer native to western, central and southern Europe, northwest Africa, northern Iran and southwest Asia.

It is a native of temperate Himalayas, Afghanistan to Bhutan and Kassia Hills and upper Burma. It is the tree originally known as Yew, though with other related trees becoming known, it may now be known as English yew or European yew. It is also known as Himalayan yew.

ECOLOGY
Yew’s habitat is characterized by moist, mixed coniferous forests or cool, broad-leaved forests. It grows in a range of soil types from light to heavy acidic shallow soils.

PROPAGATION AND CULTIVATION
Propagation of Taxus baccata: Seed - can be very slow to germinate, often taking 2 or more years. It is best sown as soon as it is ripe in the autumn when it should germinate 18 months later. Stored seed may take 2 years or more to germinate. 4 months warm followed by 4 months cold stratification may help reduce the germination time. Harvesting the seed "green" (when fully developed but before it is ripe in the autumn when it should germinate 18 months later. Stored seed may take 2 years or more to germinate. 4 months warm followed by 4 months cold stratification may help reduce the germination time. Harvesting the seed "green" (when fully developed but before it has dried on the plant) and then sowing it immediately has not been found to reduce the germination time because the inhibiting factors develop too early. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots once they are large enough to handle and grow them on in pots in a cold frame. The seedlings are very slow-growing and will probably require at least 2 years of pot cultivation before being large enough to plant out. Any planting out is best done in late spring or early summer, after the last expected frosts. Cuttings of half-ripe terminal shoots, 5 - 8cm long, July/August in a shaded frame. Should root by late September but leave them in the frame over winter and plant out in late spring. High percentage. Cuttings of ripe terminal shoots, taken in winter after a hard frost, in a shaded frame.

Cultivation of the herb: Woods and scrub, usually on limestone. It sometimes forms pure stands in sheltered sites on chalk in the south-east and on limestone in the north-west.

CHEMICAL CONSTITUENTS
Most parts of the tree are toxic, except bright red aril surrounding seed. The foliage remains toxic even when wilted and toxicity increases in potency, when dried.

The fruits and seeds seem to be the most poisonous part of the tree. An alkaloid taxin has been obtained from the seeds. This is poisonous, white, crystalline powder, only slightly soluble in water.

Leaves contain a volatile oil, tannic acid, gallic acid and resinous substance called toxin.

AYURVEDIC PROPERTIES & PHARMACOLOGICAL ACTIONS
According to ayurveda, properties of sthauneyaka are -

RASA (taste) - katu (pungent), swadu (sweet), tikta (bitter)
GUNA (properties) - snigdha (unctuous)
VIRYA (potency) - Ushna
VIPAK (metabolism) - katu

Having these properties its pharmacological actions are:-

Tridoshanut (mitigates all three doshas), Medha-shukrakar (promotes intelligence and semen), Ruchaya (helps taste), Rakshoghana (destroys evil spirits), Jwara-jantujita (cures fever, worms infestation), Hanti Kustha Asra Trit Daha (cures leprosy and other skin diseases, diseases of blood, thirst, burning sensation, bad smell and black spots (moles) of the skin).

Balapushi-vivardhanam (strength promoting)

Useful in Kasa, shwas, vata-shlesha vikar, gulma, agrinandaya, aruchi also.

MEDICINAL USES
The Taxus baccata tree is a highly toxic plant that has occasionally been used medicinally, mainly in the treatment of chest complaints.

All parts of the plant, except the fleshy fruit, are antispasmodic, cardiotonic, diaphoretic, emmenagogue, expectorant, narcotic and purgative.

Plant contain the substance "taxol" having anticancerous property.

The leaves have been used internally in the treatment of asthma, bronchitis, hiccup, indigestion, rheumatism and epilepsy. Externally, the leaves have been used in a steam bath as a treatment for rheumatism.

A homeopathic remedy is made from the young shoots and the berries. It is used in the treatment of many diseases including cystitis, eruptions, headaches, heart and kidney problems, rheumatism etc.

A tincture made from the young shoots of the plant, is used to cure headache with giddiness, feeble faltering pulse, coldness of the extremities, diarrhoea, general prostration and severe biliousness.

CONTRAINDICATIONS
This herb is not recommended during pregnancy and lactation. Large doses (many times the recommended dosage) may result in colic, dry mouth, hypotension, paleness, rash, syncope, vertigo and vomiting.

RESEARCH STUDIES
In 1021, Avicenna introduced the medicinal use of T. baccata for phytotherapy in The Canon of Medicine. He named this herbal drug "Zarnab" and used it as a cardiac remedy. This was the first known use of a calcium channel blocker drug, which were not in wide use in the Western world until the 1960s.

Certain compounds found in the bark of yew trees were discovered by Wall and Wani in 1967 to have efficacy as anticancer agents. The precursors of the chemotherapy drug...
paclitaxel (taxol) can be synthesized easily from the extracts of the leaves of European yew.

In the Central Himalayas, the plant is used as a treatment for breast and ovarian cancer. Modern research has shown that the plants contain the substance "Taxol" in their shoots. Taxol has shown exciting potential as an anti-cancer drug, particularly in the treatment of ovarian cancers. Unfortunately, the concentrations of taxol in this species are too low to be of much value commercially, though it is being used for research purposes.

**CONCLUSION**

The *Taxus baccata* is a remarkable plant once one begins to understand its importance. Human have long greeted the yew with a mixture of awe and fearful admiration. No doubt this had a lot to do with the fact that the leaves and seeds of the tree were notoriously lethal if consumed. This may not sound like a promising quality in the raw material for a medicine, but the poisonous alkaloid found in *"Taxus baccata"* contains some incredible useful chemicals. *Taxus baccata* contain the poisonous substance "taxol" in their shoots and "Taxol" has shown exciting potential as an anti-cancer drug and this plant also very useful in treating chest disorders like asthma, bronchitis, hiccup etc. and also used in the treatment of indigestion, rheumatism, epilepsy. These plants also have diuretic and laxative effect so also used medicinally to treat viper bites, hydrophobia. So, *Taxus baccata* is plants which have incredible properties to treat the diseases. Recently yew has achieved fame as a source of the important anticancerous drug, *Taxol*. So more research is needed in defining the *Taxus baccata* for the use of majestic medicinal properties of this herb.

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Source of support: Nil, Conflict of interest: None Declared