

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) – May 2018 by Ken Lent

Many folks have heard of the reputation of the bloodroot plant for being applied to skin cancers and other skin anomalies. Harvesting this plant for one's own use is rather easy once you identify it and know what to look for in the way of digging for the root and preparing it for use. (No health claims are made herein, but from my personal experience may I highly suggest that health enthusiasts consider having some bloodroot in their medicine cabinet) Usage: topical application, thus for **external use only**.



A small white flower will blossom above the leaf in March and April , then fade away

Bloodroot grows in woodland areas of partially moist soil. It does well in the mountains of Virginia, this photo being taken just 100 yards from my home. The above plant is about 5" high and 5" wide. (may grow 12" high) It can be harvested all summer but early May is a great time to locate it as it shoots up before most other plants in early Spring making it quite visible before dense foliage grows around it a few weeks later. Bloodroot has only one leaf that has its quite distinct shape.

A regular kitchen butter knife is placed to show a size comparison



The medicinal part of this plant is the root tuber (the rhizome). It will be growing horizontally to the ground a few inches under the soil. This is what we're after. A butter knife is better at digging out the root than a sharp hunting knife. A sharp knife can cut through the root section (which we don't want to happen) whereas the duller knife blade is more suited to dig out the whole root. Carefully follow the stem with your fingers down to the root and dig gently down and around the entire root tuber.



If we find a small carrot type root we have located our medicinal target.

Carefully dig below the root and the entire tuber will easily be removed by pulling on the stem.



Next, take the root to a clean water source, and with a stiff vegetable brush scrub off all of the soil particles that are attached. Here I just took our plant root to the very nearby local creek and cleaned it.



Bloodroot is called “bloodroot” because when you slice it, it actually has the appearance of flesh cut by a razor and will look like it is bleeding. A few small cuts to our root caused it to “bleed” onto the paper towel (below):



In order to obtain the medicinal juice of the root we simply need to “smash it up real good”. One reliable way is to use a mortar and pestle. A few slices will do just fine for immediate use of a topical application.



Here we see the end result of a few minutes of pressing the root into a mash pulp. Application can be by using a Q-Tip swab with the juice or by dropping/rubbing the pulp onto your skin and covering with a band-aid. Either is quite acceptable. Leave the mortar bowl in the refrigerator, and use the root pulp until gone, then simply slice and crush more pieces as needed.



Bloodroot also sun dries quickly (a few days) and can be kept rather indefinitely as a dry plant root ready to be reconstituted and used when needed. Here some root is being sun dried on my back deck rail. It will also dry well inside just by putting it on a dry cabinet shelf for a week or two.



Once the root is dry (bottom of plate) a file may be used to rasp it into a fine powder (top of plate).
Here a regular cabinet maker's rasp (on plate) did the job just super!



For application to the skin, a few drops of regular drug store hydrogen peroxide can be used to liquefy the powder if you wish to add an antiseptic as well. (mix thoroughly and let sit for at least 15 minutes) Use only enough hydrogen peroxide to make a consistency somewhat akin to a *very thick* soup. Using castor oil drops to liquefy the bloodroot powder is also a good option. To expand the healing range of the compound, some black walnut powder may be added. (ratio is 75% bloodroot – 25% black walnut). The popular “black salve” (cancer salve) is actually a mixture of bloodroot and zinc chloride. However the American frontiersman and Indians used the bloodroot alone as a skin ailment rub. Various compounds exist with a bloodroot base but this article is sufficient for a quick home production of an excellent way to ward off and/or treat suspect skin conditions. Try it on toenail fungus daily. (apply all around the nail and especially rubbed into the cuticle until the nail grows out). You may be surprised with the results. Those little nasty “cherry angiomas” don’t like bloodroot either. Give it a go. Make sure to rub the bloodroot liquid into the skin area for at least a minute with a Q-tip for penetration. Then apply a little more on top and let dry. (or band-aid if using the castor oil as it won’t dry much). If you are into making tinctures, bloodroot will be a worthy project to attempt. Bloodroot is poisonous if taken internally, so use it externally only. This article is not intended to be a diagnostic parameter for each person’s condition therefore no cure guarantee is made herein. Seek a professional health care clinic for any skin anomaly concerns. “Good hunting” for your local bloodroot plant!