



# Willow

*Salix alba*

**Family Name:** Salicaceae

**Common Name:** Willow

**Description:** A deciduous tree up to 26m tall, with rough grey bark and ascending branches. The leaves are lanceolate with silky whitish hairs on both sides, while the flowers appear at the same time as the leaves and grow in dense cylindrical male and female catkins. Blooms from September to October.

**Parts Used:** The bark, which is collected from young branches during the growing period. The active constituent, salicin is highest in spring and summer.

**Constituents:** Phenolic glycosides including salicylates, flavonoids and tannins.

**Actions:** Anti-inflammatory, analgesic (pain relief), antipyretic (prevent/reduces fever), astringent, antirheumatic.

**Medicinal Uses:** The main use of Willow is in the musculoskeletal system in the treatment of; rheumatism, gouty arthritis, arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis and systemic connective tissue disorders marked by inflammation. Within the respiratory system it is used for flu, common cold, fevers and respiratory catarrh. While for the nervous system it is an aid for mild headaches and pain of varying origin. Willow bark is still widely used in Germany, along with *Harpagophytum* (Devil's Claw) in the treatment of joint inflammation. Commission E has approved it as an anti-rheumatic agent and to treat fevers and headaches.

**Historically:** To staunch bleeding; to prevent vomiting; the leaves to treat windy colic; urinary retention, spots and discolouration of the skin. Tonic for digestive tract and post acute illness; worms; chronic diarrhoea; dysentery.  
“Redness and dimness of sight; films that grow over the eyes.”  
Leaves and/or bark for dandruff and scurf (topically).

**Harvesting:** Harvest in the early Spring as there is soft new tissue under the bark helping with ease of removal. The best times of day to harvest is mid-morning and ensure that you use sharp clean tools. Cut the bark in small strips down the trunk or young branches, only taking small amounts. It is extremely important that damage to the tree is minimal therefore NEVER cut in a ring around the trunk (called ring barking) as this will interrupt the flow of nutrients fluids up and down the tree.

**Extraction:** Decoctions are used for barks.

To make a decoction

- Coarsely grind the herb (30gm dried herb in 700 –900ml)
- Put herb in saucepan and add cold water
- Bring slowly to boil.
- Simmer 15 mins (Simmer until reduced to 600ml)