



# Eucalyptus

## Overview

Today, oil from the eucalyptus tree (*Eucalyptus globulus*) appears in many over-the-counter cough and cold products to relieve congestion. Eucalyptus oil is also used in creams and ointments to relieve muscle and joint pain, and in some mouthwashes.

In its native Australia, the eucalyptus tree is the main food for koalas. It has been used in the past as an antiseptic to kill germs. The oil was used in traditional Aboriginal medicines to heal wounds and fungal infections. Teas made of eucalyptus leaves were also used to reduce fevers. Eucalyptus was soon used in other traditional medicine systems, including Chinese, Indian (Ayurvedic), and Greek and European.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century England, eucalyptus oil was used in hospitals to clean urinary catheters. Laboratory studies later showed that eucalyptus oil contains substances that kill bacteria. It also may kill some viruses and fungi. Studies in animals and test tubes show that eucalyptus oil acts as an expectorant, meaning it helps coughs by loosening phlegm.

## Plant Description

There are many species of eucalyptus. Some are the size of an ornamental shrub, and some grow to be giant trees. The kind most often used as medicine is called blue gum or Australian fever tree. It can grow as high as 230 feet. Its 4 to 12 inch leaves are dark green and shiny. Its blue-gray bark peels to reveal a cream-colored inner bark.

## Medicinal Uses and Indications

DO NOT take eucalyptus oil by mouth unless your doctor tells you to. Ingesting eucalyptus oil can be dangerous.

## Cough and cold

Many medicines to treat coughs and the common cold contain eucalyptus. It is found in many lozenges, cough syrups, rubs, and vapor baths throughout the United States and Europe. Herbalists often recommend using fresh leaves in gargles to soothe sore throats and treat bronchitis and sinusitis.

Eucalyptus ointments are also used on the nose and chest to relieve congestion. Eucalyptus oil helps loosen phlegm, so many people breathe in eucalyptus steam to help treat bronchitis, coughs, and the flu.

## Plaque and gum disease

Eucalyptus oil is rich in cineole, an antiseptic that kills the bacteria that can cause bad breath. Some antiseptic mouthwashes use eucalyptus along with other oils, and have been shown to help prevent plaque and gingivitis.

## Other uses

On the skin, eucalyptus oil has been used to treat arthritis, boils, sores, and wounds. The oil is also used in some insect repellents. Preliminary studies have also shown that oil of lemon eucalyptus may also keep ticks away.

## What is it Made of?

The leaves and oil of the eucalyptus plant are used as medicine. Eucalyptus oil is made from the fresh leaves and branch tops of the eucalyptus plant. Eucalyptus leaves contain flavonoids (plant-based antioxidants), volatile oils, and tannins. Researchers think tannins may help reduce inflammation.

## Available Forms

Eucalyptus oil is available in many products, including liquids and ointments. The leaves are available fresh, dried (to be used in teas), and in liquid extracts. Cough drops, syrups, vaporizer fluids, liniments, toothpastes, and mouthwashes may contain eucalyptus oil or cineole, the active ingredient in eucalyptus oil. Some familiar, over-the-counter remedies that have eucalyptus oil include Listerine, Mentholatum Cherry Chest Rub, and Vicks VapoRub.

## How to Take it

### Pediatric

DO NOT give a child eucalyptus orally (by mouth) because it is toxic. DO NOT give cough drops containing eucalyptus to children under 6.

For a cold, DO NOT put eucalyptus oil, salve, or chest rub on the face or nose of a child under 2. Ask your doctor before using preparations that contain eucalyptus oil as a chest rub for your child or to inhale steam for congestion.

### Adult

DO NOT take eucalyptus oil orally (by mouth) except under your doctor's supervision due to toxicity.

## Precautions

The use of herbs is a time-honored approach to strengthening the body and treating disease. However, herbs can trigger side effects, and can interact with other herbs, supplements, or medications. For these reasons, you should take herbs under the supervision of a health care provider qualified in the field of botanical medicine.

For adults, eucalyptus oil is generally safe when applied to the skin. DO NOT put eucalyptus oil, salve, or chest rub on the face or nose of a child under 2.

People with asthma, seizures, liver disease, kidney disease, or low blood pressure should not use eucalyptus without first talking to their doctors.

Pregnant and breastfeeding women should not use eucalyptus.

Eucalyptus oil is toxic when taken by mouth. DO NOT ingest eucalyptus oil except under your doctor's supervision.

## Possible Interactions

You should never take eucalyptus orally. It is toxic if consumed by mouth, and may interact with several medications. If you are currently taking medications that are processed by the liver, speak with your physician before using eucalyptus preparations. Eucalyptus may act on the liver, and thus impact how a wide variety of medications are metabolized. You should not take eucalyptus without talking to your doctor first if you are being treated with the following medication:

**5-Fluorouracil (5-FU):** In an animal study, using eucalyptus oil on the skin caused more absorption of topical 5-FU, a medication used to treat cancer.

## Supporting Research

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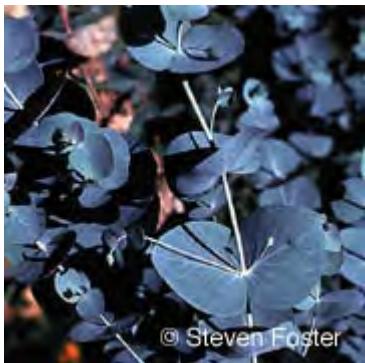
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## Alternative Names

Australian fever tree; Blue gum; *Eucalyptus globulus*; Red gum



## Version Info

- Last reviewed on 4/29/2015
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