

285. *PTYCHOPETALUM OLACOIDES* Benth. (OLACACEAE) — Potency Wood, Muira Puama

The “aphrodisiac” drug, muira puama, comes from the stems of *P. olacoides* and *P. uncinatum*, while the roots are considered a panacea.²⁴ The drug is administered by mouth, either as a powder, an alcoholic extract, or a decoction (extract formed by boiling in water). An alternative method of obtaining the aphrodisiac effect is to bathe the genitals with a concentrated decoction. It is applied locally for rheumatism and muscle paralysis.³⁷

Reported to be aperitif, aphrodisiac, CNS-stimulant, nervine, and tonic, potency wood is a folk remedy for dyspepsia, neuralgia, paralysis, and rheumatism.^{32,33} The drug has a long history of use in Brazil as a powerful aphrodisiac and nerve stimulant. It is an ingredient in a number of proprietary remedies and folk medicines for sexual impotence. Muira puama is also touted for dyspepsia, menstrual irregularities, rheumatism, and paralysis caused by poliomyelitis, and as a general tonic and aperitif.

Hager's Handbook reports 0.05% “muirapuamin”, 0.5% alkaloid, 0.4% fat, 0.6% phlobaphene, 0.6% alpha-resinic acid, 0.7% beta resinic acid.³³ Chemically, muira puama contains 0.4 to 0.5% of a mixture of esters, two thirds of which is behenic acid, lupeol, and beta-sitosterol; in the remaining portion, campesterol and other fatty acids (arachinic-, lignoceric-, uncosanin-, tricosanic-, and pentacosanic-acids) replace the behenic acid. Other more-or-less routine plant constituents are volatile oil, resin, fat, tannin, and various fatty acids.

Toxicity — “None of the constituents in this drug is known to exhibit any pronounced physiological activity. This, plus the lack of any reported clinical testing of muira puama, causes us to review its reported effects with considerable skepticism. Until such tests have been carried out, no claims of efficacy or safety can be substantiated, and we must conclude at this point that potency wood is instead impotent.”³⁷