

257. *PAUSINYSTALIA JOHIMBE* (K. Schum.) (RUBIACEAE) — Yohimbe

Yohimbine (quebrachine, corynine, aphrodines), found in *P. johimbe* (also, in *Rauvolfia*), is an adrenergic blocking agent, which has been used in angina pectoris and arteriosclerosis, and was formerly used as a local anesthetic, mydriatic, and, especially in veterinary medicine, as an aphrodisiac.²⁰ Yohimbine, which causes hypotension, is reported to be a cardiovascular depressant, with hypnotic activity and a relatively high toxicity.¹ Tyler notes that some authors recommend snuffing yohimbine to obtain both stimulant and mild hallucinogenic effects.³⁷ Ajmaline has been reported to stimulate respiration and intestinal movements. Its action on systemic and pulmonary blood pressure is similar to serpentine's. "The drug dilates the blood vessels of the skin and mucous membranes and thereby lowers blood pressure. Its alleged aphrodisiac effects are attributed not only to this enlargement of blood vessels in the sexual organs but to increased reflex excitability in the sacral (lower) region of the spinal cord."³⁷ "At Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., urologist Alvaro Morales and a team of researchers have conducted a study of yohimbine's effect on 23 men with impotence related to physical problems, like diabetes. The men were given laboratory-synthesized yohimbine daily for eight to ten weeks. Ten improved, with six once again able to sustain erection and reach orgasm. The drug unexpectedly also relieves some of the numbness and prickling in the legs that frequently afflict diabetics. Unpleasant side effects were limited to temporary dizziness or gastrointestinal upset. The Canadian team is now beginning a two-year study of yohimbine vs. placebo in 120 men with impotence of organic or psychological origin. How yohimbine helps potency is a mystery. The chemical blocks or stimulates the release of adrenaline at nerve endings in different parts of the body. Researchers think that this action changes blood flow or the transmission of nerve impulses to genital tissue."²⁴⁸

Widely regarded in the counterculture as an aphrodisiac and not so widely accepted to lower blood pressure. The closely related *P. macroceras* has other reputed attributes. In Ghana, the Ivory Coast, and Upper Volta, a bark decoction is used for fevers and leprosy and the bark is chewed for coughs. Yohimbine is available commercially as an aphrodisiac, but claims for sexual stimulation have not been adequately supported.¹¹ Yohimbine is hallucinogenic in large doses,¹¹ but, I might add, a dangerous hallucinogen or aphrodisiac. Rose⁴⁷ states that yohimbe "causes a tingling sensation in the genitals."⁴⁷ According to *Hager's Handbook*, the herb is used as an aphrodisiac, for psychic impotence, for dysmenorrhea, for prostatitis with bladder complaints, and as a local anesthetic for eye, ear, and nose operations.³³

The bark of both species contains yohimbine, and various configurations thereof, while that of yohimbe also contains ajmaline, alloyohimbine, corynanthine, corynantheine, dihydrocorynantheine, pseudoyohimbine, quebrachine, and tetrahydromethylcorynanthein. Yohimbine is available commercially as yohimbine hydrochloride combined with methyltestosterone and nux vomica; but the manufacturer's claim of relieving male impotence, as judged by the number of erections and orgasms per week achieved by patients, apparently deserves no great credence.¹¹ Tannin is also reported.

Toxicity — The FDA classifies this as an unsafe herb, containing "the toxic alkaloid, yohimbine (quebrachine), and other alkaloids." Yohimbine is a monoamine oxidase inhibitor, hence, users should avoid tyramine-containing foods (cheese, liver, red wines) and drugs containing phenylpropanolamine. Persons suffering diabetes, low blood pressure, and heart, kidney, and liver disorders should avoid the drug. According to Tyler, yohimbine may actually activate psychoses in schizophrenics.³⁷ Upon drinking a tea made by adding 6 to 10 teaspoons shaved yohimbe bark to 1 pt boiling water, the experimenter may experience lethargic debility of the limbs, restlessness, chills and shivers, with some nausea and vertigo.⁵¹ The LD₅₀ of corynanthine is 250 mg/kg subcutaneously in mice.