

MORE ABOUT THE HERBS IN THE RENE CAISSE TEA (Essiac)

Rene Caisse was a Canadian nurse who developed a simple herbal formula from the original eight herb recipe given by a Native American herbalist to one of her patients as a remedy for breast cancer, at the end of the nineteenth century.

The tea consists of four herbs: sheep sorrel tops and root, burdock root, turkey rhubarb root and slippery elm bark, and has a long track record for supporting the body holistically during cancer. However, the tea may also benefit those diagnosed with other chronic illness, including diabetes and osteoarthritis.

SHEEP SORREL

Rumex acetosella

Sheep sorrel was regarded by Rene Caisse as having the most direct effect on health and is therefore a vital component of the herbal tea. Known as Gypsy Rhubarb in southern England, the tangy, slightly astringent leaves have been used traditionally to flavour salads and soups as well as stuffings and fish. And the whole plant has wide ranging therapeutic effects.

In our Essiac, the ground sheep sorrel leaves and stems are bought in from organic herb suppliers in the UK. The roots, are harvested in the UK after the first winter frosts, when the plant is dormant. Indeed it is the root which provides additional, concentrated therapeutic elements and small quantities should always be included in the tea. **Our team are one of the few, if only, producers of “Essiac” tea to include the powdered root.**

BURDOCK

Arctium lappa

Burdock forms one of the cornerstones of the Rene Caisse Herbal Tea: more than half of the dried herb mixture consists of ground burdock root. The roots (and seeds) have a long tradition of use in the herbal pharmacy and burdock is a favourite amongst herbalists, with very good reason.

In the “essiac” formula, one-year-old burdock root provides a wide spectrum of therapeutic benefits, including **blood cleansing** and **immune boosting** functions. It has mild **anti-bloodclotting** activity.

The herb also **protects the liver** and **aids digestion** and **appetite** by stimulating the production of bile. It is therefore also known to be a mild **laxative** and **diuretic**, helping to **clear toxins** from the body. By supporting the liver, it is particularly helpful for **skin conditions** such as psoriasis and acne and may be used topically as a poultice.

It is **antibacterial**, **anti-inflammatory** and **antioxidant** and also **aids kidney function**, protecting against cystitis and gout. It can help to **reduce coughing and fever**, as well as **regulate blood sugar levels**.

SLIPPERY ELM

Ulmus fulva/rubra

The inner bark of the Slippery Elm tree is an essential component of the Rene Caisse

herbal tea, making up nearly 10% of the dried mixture. Finely ground, the powder has **demulcent** and **anti-inflammatory** qualities, helping to **soothe** the mucous membrane lining of the **digestive tract**, which makes it especially useful during **chemotherapy**.

It is also useful for gastritis, enteritis, haemorrhoids and gastric or duodenal ulcers, as well as sore throats.

Its **nutritious** qualities make it a valuable food during convalescence as it is easily absorbed. It has gentle astringent properties as well and helps to ease diarrhoea. An excellent source of soluble **fibre**, slippery elm bark may help to reduce cholesterol levels, as well as bulk up the stool when constipated.

Externally, the powder may be mixed to a paste with water and applied to boils, ulcers and abscesses.

In fact, the herb has an ancient history: in Culpeper's day, it was mixed with vinegar or brine and applied externally to ease gout, or decocted and dabbed on to burns.

Apart from its use in the herbal tea, the powdered bark may be taken on its own in warm milk or water: 1 teaspoon per cup three times a day. Because of its demulcent properties, however, it would be best to take it away from any other medication, food or supplement as it may delay or inhibit their absorption. And it is best to avoid slippery elm during pregnancy as the bark may stimulate labour.

TURKEY RHUBARB

Rheum palmatum

The dried, powdered root of Turkey rhubarb constitutes a small but significant part of the Rene Caisse herbal tea: only approximately 300mg are used in the 15g monthly pack.

Also known as East India or China Rhubarb, it was originally imported from China and Tibet, but can now be grown and harvested locally. It comes from the same family as our native English rhubarb *Rheum raphaniticum*, which has similar if milder actions.

Turkey rhubarb has bitter, astringent qualities and is known as an effective digestive stimulant and liver tonic. At varying doses, it can be used to treat both constipation and diarrhoea and therefore has a regulatory effect on digestion. It stimulates the appetite and promotes the flow of bile from the liver, thus optimising the action of digestive enzymes, reducing liver congestion and preventing the formation of gallstones.

In Ayurvedic medicine, Turkey rhubarb is thought to reduce cholesterol, heal ulcers in the digestive tract, reduce gastrointestinal bleeding, including haemorrhoids, and clear tumours and toxins from the bowel.

However, because of the anthraquinone constituents of Turkey rhubarb, it is contraindicated in pregnancy and breastfeeding.

According to Thomas Bartram, Turkey rhubarb forms part of the ancient Sanskrit remedy, Soma, for courage, wisdom and longevity.