Two Kinds
by R Givens

| Dose: T+ 0:00 | 2 tsp | oral | Calamus |

| Body weight: | 160 lbs |

TWO KINDS OF *Acorus calamus*

About 30 years ago I did some experimenting with North American *Acorus calamus* root.

I ate about a foot of the dried (just peeled) rootstock I collected from a nearby swamp. Within about 90 minutes I experienced a pleasant mild psychedelic trip that lasted several hours.

The rootstock tasted extremely bitter, but there was no nausea or vomiting or even a gag reflex when I ate it. Once I managed to get the bitter root down there were no digestive upsets whatsoever. The experience was pleasant although not as intensely psychedelic as LSD. Acorus has its own psychedelic ‘flavor.’

I tried *Acorus calamus* because of reports I had read in various herbal books.

I also had occasion to use *Acorus calamus* for severe toothache. I had an infected nerve in a molar that required a root canal. Unfortunately the tooth blew up on a Saturday and I had to wait until Monday afternoon to see a dentist.

I started off taking pain-relieving gels for toothache. This stuff worked OK for about four hours and then the continued applications lost their effect. Having nothing else, and being in considerable pain I decided to try the *Acorus calamus* which an herbal had recommended for toothache pain.

I cut a two-inch piece of rootstock, peeled it and put it in contact with the gums and the affected tooth. The pain relief was rapid and effective.

The *Acorus calamus* worked extremely well so far as relieving the severe pain, but chewing the extremely bitter root and keeping it in contact with the bad tooth was not pleasant because of the bitter taste. I did not get any stomach upset, but the taste was not to my liking.

*Acorus calamus* relieved the toothache agony without producing the numbness associated with other painkillers. In fact, there was no change in sensation of hot and cold and the gums were still sensitive to pressure and touch. At the same time the pain was gone.

I successfully used *Acorus calamus* to relieve severe nerve pain for over 48 hours. I was even able to sleep.

This is a very unusual toothache remedy that should be studied because of the unique characteristic of relieving pain without subduing other sensations. Once the chemists get the mixture right this stuff might replace novocaine! It is certainly worth testing.
When I ate calamus for psychedelic purposes it was very bitter going down, but there wasn’t even a burp afterward.

My encounter with wild North American *Acorus calamus* was basically pleasant and with no pain added. I experienced no nausea, no vomiting and no diarrhea.

THE WRONG KIND OF ACORUS

Some measure of confusion exists over the taxonomic status of Acorus in North America. Whether native or introduced, whether one or more species, have been among the questions. Recent studies of morphology, essential oil chemistry, cytology, isozymes, and ethnobotany suggest the existence of two species in North America — *Acorus calamus*, an introduced Eurasian species and *Acorus americanus*, the native Sweet Flag. The Integrated Taxonomic Information System (ITIS) lists the accepted name of North American Sweet Flag as *Acorus americanus* (TSN182561). Because all Sweet Flag in North America has long been lumped together as *Acorus calamus*, especially in the popular, non-professional realm, expect the confusion to continue.

[http://www.rook.org/earl/bwca/nature/aquatics/acorus.html](http://www.rook.org/earl/bwca/nature/aquatics/acorus.html)

A few months ago I set out to repeat my experience with some PURE LAND *Acorus calamus* essential oil from rhizome. I took two teaspoons of the essential oil.

Within a matter of a minute or so I was overcome with severe nausea and vomiting that lasted for eight straight unforgettable agonizing hours. I have never experienced such prolonged extreme nausea and vomiting in my life. I also had severe diarrhea that sent me to the bathroom every 15 minutes or so.

The waves of nausea and diarrhea were unrelenting and extreme. They lasted until I was exhausted from heaving.

I vomited a reddish liquid for hours. The taste of the Acorus essential oil was extremely unpleasant. (I can still remember that nauseous flavor with precision!)

After about eight hours the vomiting abated, but I felt extremely nauseated for another whole day. I was on the verge of throwing up all the next day. I was unable to sleep.

The impact of this ordeal left me totally dehydrated and unable to ingest sufficient food and drink for over a week. My health deteriorated to the point where I had to be hospitalized for five days to restore my fluid balances etc.

The effects of this ordeal suppressed my appetite severely and I was unable to eat enough. I lost over 15 pounds during this ordeal! But I do not recommend it as a diet aid.

It should be noted that I am 60 years old and have existing health problems that the *Acorus calamus* experience intensified. It took well over a month to recover.

I did not experience any of the psychedelic effects I was looking for.

If anybody is thinking about trying the imported PURE LAND *Acorus calamus* essential oil from rhizome or imported calamus rhizomes, my advice is to forget it unless you want an ugly,
unpleasant, unrewarding ‘trip.’ This stuff will make you sick!

After some thought it became clear that there is a big difference between the North American calamus and the stuff from India and elsewhere. The literature on the subject supports this view.

‘The calamus (flag) was widely regarded as a stirring physic for the entire system, this being approved by a nineteenth-century white scientist who wrote that ’sweet flag roots possess carminative and tonic properties’ with ‘a taste which is not unpleasant.’


Exerpts from Stalking The Wild Asparagus by Euell Gibbons

Candied Calamus Root was a popular confection a few generations ago. It was sold in shops and on street corners and was often made at home. The early Shaker communities made a specialty of this product. Now we have forgotten how to make it, and even how to eat it.

Gibbons says ‘The spicy pungency of the calamus is a good flavor but there is a bit too much of it for most recipe tastes, unless one changes the cooking water four or five times.’

‘This confection is too pungent and strong-flavored to be consumed in quantity, but it does make a tempting nibble. Besides its spiciness it has a strong flavor that some people dislike, describing it as a soapy taste. However, I have found that if one keeps some around and takes an occasional nibble, the job of learning to like it is soon replaced with the task of keeping enough on hand.’

‘For medicinal purposes the yellowish, horizontal rhizomes, an inch or more in diameter and found only a few inches underground, are the part most often used. A sharp trowel or an asparagus knife is the best tool for collecting them. Just grasp the rhizome with one hand and slide the cutting edge of your instrument along under it to sever the numerous roots that hold it down.’

‘The unpeeled rhizome should be washed and thoroughly dried in the sun. On drying it loses part of its biting pungency. It can be taken in several ways, the simplest of which is to merely cut off a half-inch length of the dried rhizome and chew on it, swallowing the juice.’

According to Gibbons eating Calamus rhizomes was not an unpleasant experience which convinces me that we are talking about two different varieties of Acorus calamus. Gibbon’s native American calamus must have been what I found in that swamp years ago because there was absolutely nothing remotely enjoyable about the flavor of Acorus calamus essential oil from rhizome.

Gibbons remarks that people found calamus as ‘pleasant to take as a tea’ and used it for a candy which definitely removes the Euro-asian variety of Acorus calamus from consideration for these purposes.

Even in a diluted down state the Acorus calamus essential oil from rhizome would be impossible to use for a candy no matter how much the taste is diluted. The foreign variety is thoroughly nauseating.

Virgil Vogel says that Sweet flag (*Acorus calamus*) was ‘held in high esteem by all tribes’ of the Plains region as a carminative; a decoction was drunk for fever, and the rootstock was chewed to relieve toothache and stop coughing.

The Menominees used small doses of medicine made from the root for stomach cramps and as a physic. Besides these uses, the Pillager Ojibwas employed calamus for ‘cold in the throat.’ Potawatomis sniffed the powdered root up the nose for catarrh and used it as an ingredient of a remedy to stop hemorrhage. Meskwaki Indians used the boiled root for similar purposes as well as for burn treatment. 1081

Calamus or sweet flag was official in the USP, 1820-1916, and in the NF, 1936-50. It was considered effective as a carminative, stimulant, and aromatic bitter tonic, besides being used as a flavoring agent. 1082

From: American Indian Medicine, by Virgil J. Vogel Copyright 1970, by the University of Oklahoma Press.

Perspectives on Medicinal uses of Native Plants
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Presented at the Prairie Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Conference - Olds, Alberta - March 3-5, 1996

One of the most widely used and potentially marketable native medicinal plants is sweet flag or ratroot (*Acorus calamus*, Araceae), which due to its content of phenylpropanoids and other constituents has been proven to be a safe and effective antispasmodic for gastrointestinal problems and coughs—two of its principal traditional uses.

http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/crops/special/medconf/marles.html

Accounts like these make it clear that the ‘ratroot’ used by the Indians and early settlers was not the toxic Euro-asian variety.

The north American Indians used *Acorus calamus* as a stimulant, a psychedelic and a medicine. The Indians call *Acorus calamus* ‘ratroot..’ They say eating about one foot of fresh rootstock equals an LSD trip. This more or less conforms to my experience with the calamus I found in the wild.

One account attributes General Custer’s defeat at the Little Big Horn to *Acorus calamus*. Supposedly some tribes traveled hundreds of miles with pursuing US Calvary trying to overtake and murder them. The Indians were headed for Canada and they were making forced marches of over 110 miles a day with their women and children in the party. The venerable cowards of the US Calvary couldn’t make such long marches day after day and the Indians were far ahead of their pursuers when they whacked out General Custer and his bloodthirsty band of Indian Murderers.
They were waiting for the 7th Calvary at the Little Big Horn and gave Custer what he and the US Army so richly deserved— annihilation.

According to this account 10 inches of ‘ratroot’ was good for a 100-mile forced march!

Indians today report that ‘ratroot’ is a cure for alcoholism — an effect common to many psychedelics.

GETTING THE RIGHT PLANT

It is clear from my personal experience and the reports of others that the imported Acorus calamus is a different specie or variety of the plant with a different chemistry. It also seems clear that ONLY the wild North American calamus should be used for psychedelic purposes.

Because of my distressing ordeal with the Acorus calamus essential oil from rhizome I cannot recommend this plant to anyone. However, since some people are going to try the stuff anyway here’s my best advice.

1. Only use North American Acorus calamus that you pick yourself or get from a 100% reliable source! Do NOT use any of the imported Acorus calamus material being sold over the Internet

2. Be sure that you get the right plant. Acorus calamus is easy to identify because of its pleasant aroma. Once you smell the genuine article there will be no mistakes because no other plant that resembles calamus has such an odor. Just crush a leaf and you will know right away whether the plant is Acorus calamus. (I cannot say whether the Euro-asian variety calamus has the same aroma.)

The cattail which calamus superficially resembles has a narrower leaf that is blue–green in color while the North American Acorus calamus has a yellow–green leaf.

At first glance cattails and Acorus look the same, but once you take a really good look at the Acorus next to the cattails (where it is almost always found) you should be able to distinguish calamus from cattails a hundred feet away. Cattails are blue–green and calamus is yellow–green and the leaf is somewhat broader than a cattail leaf.

3. Here are Euell Gibbons guidelines for identifying wild Acorus calamus

‘A patch of calamus, from a distance might be mistaken for either wild iris or young cattails, although it has yellow-green leaves rather than the blue-green of those two plants. Calamus leaves are shaped like very narrow, flimsy, two-edged swords, measure up to three feet or more in length, and all spring from the base of the plant. Where they join the stem, usually just under the surface of the ground, they are of a reddish-purple color and tightly clasp one another. The calamus flower is a dry, finger-like spike which grows off at an angle from a flower stall, that resembles a slightly altered leaf, and is usually found from one to two feet above the ground. As you can see by the illustration, the stem turns at an angle, just under the surface, and there are numerous roots on the bottom of it. Every part of the calamus plant, the leaves, stem, roots and rhizome, has a spicy, aromatic aroma, and this pleasant fragrance can be used to distinguish this herb from others that resemble it superficially.’

STALKING THE WILD ASPARAGUS, by Euell Gibbons, copyright 1970. Reprinted November,
1970. p50

4. Try a very small dose first to see how you react to the *Acorus calamus*. If you take the wrong plant even a tiny piece will make you very sick and you’ll be very glad you didn’t take more.

5. I do not recommend this plant for psychedelic purposes because of the bad experience I had with the foreign variety, but if you are determined to try calamus, use the North American variety of *Acorus calamus*.