

Kootenay Girl Apothecary

Plant Fact Sheet – Oregon Grape



Quick ID

Evergreen shrub with glossy, holly-like leaves and clusters of deep blue berries.

Leaves: Thick, leathery, spiny edges, arranged in leaflets along a stem.

Flowers: Bright yellow, fragrant, in clusters in spring.

Berries: Blue to purple, with a white bloom on the skin, held in tight clusters.

Where It Grows

- Common in forests and open woods of Western North America.
- Likes partial shade to sun, often on slopes, rocky sites, and forest edges.
- Frequently found in coniferous and mixed woodlands.

Ethical Harvesting

- Harvest away from sprayed areas, roadsides, and heavily used dog-walk zones.
- Take small amounts from many plants rather than stripping one.
- If using root or stem bark, go lightly – the plant is slow to recover.
- Respect cultural and ecological importance; follow local guidelines.

Best Parts to Use

Berries – very tart; used in food (jellies, syrups, mixed-fruit preserves).

Root and stem bark – berberine-rich; used traditionally for digestion and certain skin conditions.

Leaves – mainly for identification rather than common internal use.

When to Harvest

Berries: Mid-late summer when fully blue and slightly soft to the touch.

Root/Stem bark: Traditionally taken in fall or very early spring from established plants only, and sparingly.

Common Uses

- Tart berries for jams, jellies, and syrups (usually combined with sweeter fruits).
- Root/inner bark in tinctures and decoctions for sluggish digestion, liver support, and skin-focused protocols.
- Sometimes used by herbalists as a berberine source where barberry or goldenseal might otherwise be chosen.

Basic Preparations

Food uses (berries):

- Jelly or jam – cook with water and sugar; strain if desired; often blended with milder fruits.
- Syrup – simmer berries with water, strain, then add sweetener and reduce.

Herbal uses (root/inner bark):

- Decoction – long, slow simmer of chopped bark in water; very bitter and strong.
- Tincture – usually prepared by experienced herbalists using careful dosing.

Always work with small amounts and pay attention to your body.

Safety Notes

- Root and bark are potent and not for long-term, high-dose use.
- Avoid during pregnancy and use caution with medications, especially those processed by the liver.
- Berries are generally considered safe as food when ripe and properly prepared.
- Educational only – not a substitute for individualized

medical advice.

Summary

- Distinct evergreen shrub with holly-like leaves and blue berries.
- Berries: intensely sour but excellent in preserves and syrups.
- Root/inner bark: strong, berberine-rich herbal ally for digestive and skin-related protocols in traditional use.
- A powerful plant that rewards careful, respectful, and well-informed use.