

Nature's Field

An Electronic Journal for NSP Distributors

Cascara Sagrada

By Steven Horne with Mark Montgomery

Cascara sagrada (Spanish for "sacred bark") is the bark of the California buckthorn, botanically known as *Rhamnus purshiana*. This 15 to 25 foot-high tree grows in the western United States, from Idaho west to California and north to Alaska. Its name came from the Spanish priests who acted as doctors to their parishioners in the days when the western territories still belonged to Spain. Originally used by the Native Americans, cascara sagrada was quickly adopted by these priests and other settlers who boiled it for several hours in order to use it as a tonic and laxative.

Cascara bark is collected in spring and early summer, when it is easily peeled from the wood. It is dried in the shade and aged for at least a year, and up to three years. Its effects improve with age. The uncured bark is a violent purgative and an emetic (induces vomiting). The aged bark mellows in action.

Cascara sagrada continues to be used today as a stimulant laxative. It contains anthraquinone glycosides, compounds that are not absorbed in the small intestine, but travel to the colon unabsorbed. In the colon, the action of intestinal bacteria removes the sugars from the glycosides, creating compounds that inhibit the absorption of water and electrolytes from the colon. This softens and bulks the stool. Other compounds in cascara stimulate local prostaglandin production and contribute to the cathartic action. The laxative action takes place about six to ten hours after taking it, so the best time to take cascara is before bedtime. This promotes a normal bowel movement in the morning.

Starting in the late 19th century, cascara was marketed by a pharmaceutical firm as a laxative and eventually became one of the most popular herbal medicines in the world. Today, derivatives of cascara are ingredients in many over-the-counter laxatives. One article estimated that doctors write out over 2.5 million prescriptions each year for products that contain it.

Obviously, cascara is primarily used as a laxative, but it does have other effects. It stimulates bile flow from the gall bladder



Photo by Steven Foster

and digestive secretions from the pancreas, so it has been used, usually as part of a formula, for sluggish digestive, liver and gallbladder function. It is also used for expelling parasites.

Cascara is considered gentler, and less habit-forming, than other anthraquinone-bearing laxatives, such as senna and aloe. However, like other anthraquinone-bearing herbs, cascara can also cause intestinal cramping in some people, which is why it is often combined with antispasmodic

herbs in laxative formulas.

Although some herbalists have taught that cascara is not habit-forming at all, experience shows that people can become dependent on cascara when it is taken habitually. In addition, long-term use of cascara can result in a depletion of electrolytes (since it inhibits their absorption). Cascara can also stain the colon black when taken over long periods of time. This is because it contains a black dye. However, there are no harmful effects from this.

The bottom line is that cascara sagrada, like any other stimulant laxative, should not be taken for extended periods of time, as habitual use will end up weakening the colon. It should be reserved for cleansing programs and occasional constipation. People need to learn the underlying reasons for constipation and change them, rather than becoming dependant on laxatives for constipation in the same way that many people are dependent on painkillers for headaches.

Cascara is an important ingredient in NSP's All Cell Detox, Bowel Detox, BP-X, CleanStart, Enviro-Detox, Herbal Pumpkin, LB Extract, LB-X, LBS II and SF.

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Steven Horne's Ramblings and Ravings

Helping People to Stay Regular Without Laxatives

Many years ago, I remember Ed Bashaw telling people that if they went to several “experts” for nutritional advice each “expert” would tell them different things. He was right, of course, and his solution to this “problem” is the same as mine—“Learn all you can but trust yourself. Learn what works best for you. It may not be right for anyone else, but if it works for you, that’s great!”

It’s very good advice. Don’t take anyone’s opinion as gospel truth, even mine. Nothing makes me more nervous than people who act like Steven Horne can do no wrong. The fact is, that I’ve been wrong plenty of times, and from time to time, I’ve had to “unlearn” things I thought I knew.

My Personal View on Laxative Herbs

One of the things I had to “unlearn” was about stimulant laxatives like cascara sagrada. I first learned about cascara sagrada from Ed Millet, who had worked with Dr. John Christopher. Both of these men believed that cascara acted as a tonic to the colon and was not habituating. So, I actually taught this myself for a while, until I started to observe people who couldn’t “go” without taking stimulant laxatives.

I had never taken cascara or any other laxative for anything but the occasional cleanse because I absolutely hated the taste of the herb, and not just because it’s bitter. I don’t mind goldenseal, which is also bitter. I assumed that if I hated the taste that much, it was my body’s way of telling me it wasn’t good for me. It’s not that I haven’t taken formulas containing laxative herbs (I have), but I’ve tended to use enemas or other approaches when I got constipated, and leave the laxatives alone except when I’ve been doing a cleanse.

My favorite herbalist, Samuel Thomson, didn’t seem to rely on laxatives for cleansing. In fact, he didn’t think it was a good idea. He said, “Physic [laxatives] I would by no means choose, to have you first or last to use; for if you use it much in course, it will disorder reinforce.” Also, we just had this discussion on Herbal Hall, the professional herbalist news group, and all the professional herbalists in the group felt the same way about laxative herbs that I do.

Now don’t go misquoting me and saying that Steven Horne says Cascara Sagrada, Senna or other laxative herbs are bad. I don’t think that at all. I don’t think they are “dangerous” either. It’s just that they are “band-aids” for the problem of constipation. So, just like I don’t think that taking pain-killers is going to be a permanent solution to anyone’s headaches, I don’t think

laxatives are a permanent solution to anyone’s bowel problems. Both work, they just don’t get to the cause. Remember that my favorite quote from Samuel Thomson is, “Remove the cause and the effect will cease.” If we want to really correct constipation permanently, we need to first find the cause.

Iridology and Intestinal Health

I find that iridology is indispensable as a tool for helping to identify what is going on in the intestines and selecting the right remedies to help a person stay regular. For starters, one should look at the position of the collarette (also called the autonomic nerve wreath). A collarette that is close to the pupil, as shown in Figure 1, indicates a bowel that tends to be spastic. A spastic bowel has tight muscle tone that tends to constrict and have a hard time relaxing.

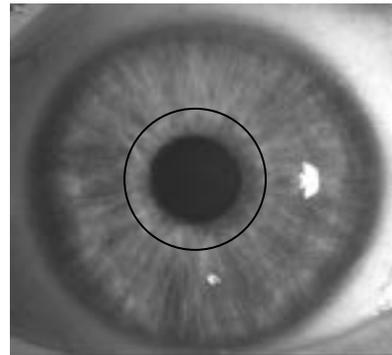


Figure 1

The black circle shows the position of the collarette, which is very close to the pupil. This indicates a tendency to a spastic or tense bowel.

I find that people with tight collarettes are the ones who are most likely to become dependent on laxatives. They also don’t tolerate coarse fiber products like bran and psyllium. They tend to do much better on softer, mucilaginous fibers like slippery elm and pectin. Intestinal Soothe and Build or Everybody’s Fiber are good products to start them on. Fresh ground flax seeds, mixed with Everybody’s Fiber, are also very good for spastic colons.

Contraction furrows (also called nerve rings), which are shown in Figure 2, are signs of a tendency to muscle tension and stress. This tendency to muscle tension would also tend to make the colon spastic, because the colon is a muscle, too. Magnesium and nervines like Nutri-Calm can be very helpful for relaxing muscle spasticity, and may help promote better bowel movements in the process. I’ve found that antispasmodics like Lobelia or Kava Kava will often act as a laxative for people

with spastic colons when taken in larger quantities with plenty of water. It works well for me!

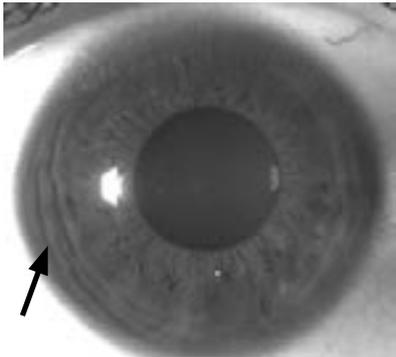


Figure 2

The arrow points to a contraction furrow (nerve ring) which shows the tendency to muscle tension. Muscle tension can affect the bowel and be an underlying cause of constipation.

When the collarette is expanded, as shown in Figure 3, the person's colon tends to lack muscular tone. Again, the colon is a muscle, and like any muscle it needs exercise to stay toned. Fiber, when taken with plenty of water, swells up in the colon and presses against the colon walls. This stimulates the nerves to make the colon muscle contract, which exercises the colon. This is the same thing cascara does, except that cascara is inhibiting the absorption of water from the colon. When you are dehydrated, the colon absorbs more water out of the stool to try to hydrate you. That's why your stool gets dry and you get constipated. I think water and fiber are a better solution.

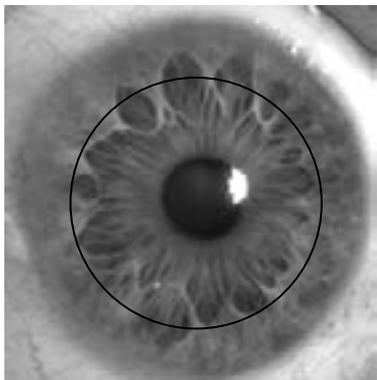


Figure 3

The black circle shows the expanded position of the collarette, as compared to the contracted position shown in Figure 1. This indicates the tendency to an atonic or sluggish colon. The rounded openings (lacuna) inside the collarette are areas that tend to form diverticula.

People with expanded collarettes generally need a lot of coarse dietary fiber. Psyllium Hulls combination or Nature's Three usually work best for them. They also tolerate stimulant laxatives better, but still shouldn't overuse them.

Radial furrows (also known as radii solaris lines) indicate a lack of nerve supply to parts of the intestinal wall. These are illustrated in Figure 4. This can result in weak areas where toxic leakage (i.e. leaky gut) is more likely. Intestinal leakage means that the colon tends to absorb too much fluid and solids, including waste materials. This would make one more prone to drier stools and constipation. It also increases intestinal inflammation and irritation. The Kudzu/St. John's wort formula is a very good one for reducing intestinal leakage and toning

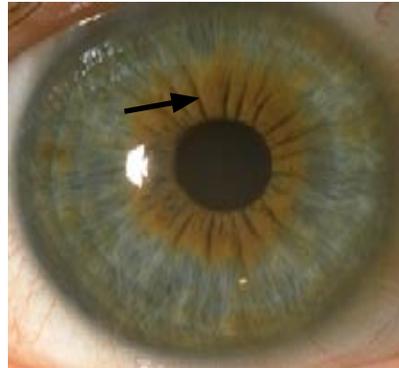


Figure 4

The arrow points to a radial furrow, a nerve deficiency that tends to create intestinal leakage. The color at the center of the iris also suggests digestive toxicity. The color indicates that the gallbladder and/or pancreas needs help.

the intestinal membranes. Essential fatty acids and flax seeds can also be helpful.

The photo in Figure 4 also illustrates a central heterochromia. This is the color concentrated towards the center of the iris. This color indicates a tendency to digestive system toxicity, which is probably due to problems with digestion. As long as the body isn't breaking down food properly, the colon will be toxic and constipation will be a problem. Hence, supporting the liver, stomach and pancreas is often needed to get the colon working properly again.

The colors in the iris can provide clues as to which organs need help. Bright orange points to the pancreas, darker orange to the pancreas and/or gallbladder, brown to the liver. Digestive enzymes like Protease and Proactazyme will act as a laxative when taken regularly and can help restore normal function to the colon. Cholagagoue herbs that stimulate bile flow will improve digestive function and also increase peristalsis in the intestines.

I know that laxative herbs are top-selling products in the NSP line, and I'm not trying to say that these are bad products—they aren't. That's why we're featuring them in this issue. It's just important for people to understand that laxatives aren't the total answer to colon health. It's necessary to look deeper and get to the cause of people's bowel problems if we really want them to achieve optimal health, and as I've shown, iridology helps you do.

Steven H. Horne is a professional member and past president of the American Herbalists Guild, a certified iridologist with the International Iridology Practitioners Association and a gifted teacher and consultant in the field of natural health care. He is president of Tree of Light Publishing.





Kimberly Balas' Clinician's Corner

Magnesium Testing, High Calcium and Other Questions

Magnesium Testing

Is there a way to check absorption of magnesium in the body? I don't believe it will totally show in a blood test. Are there tests that can be done?

Jeff

You can read serum levels of magnesium in the blood tests, but what they actually check here is the bicarbonate ion production. About half of the body's magnesium is found in the soft tissue and muscle cells and the remainder in the bones.

Serum magnesium is found extracellularly and is therefore not the best method for assessing tissue levels of magnesium. If you need a more accurate assessment of magnesium in the tissues, then run a red blood cell magnesium test because the red blood cells should contain two to three times the concentration of magnesium found in the serum. You can use normal lab ranges on this test.

If you are using the serum magnesium number to determine magnesium levels in the body, then remember that the serum magnesium is bound to albumin. If albumin is low, then usually it will drive serum magnesium low as well and vice-versa. If albumin is normal and magnesium is out of range, then you know you have a fairly good reading on the serum magnesium.

Hypercalcemia

My niece has just been diagnosed by her doctor with hypercalcemia, which is basically way too much calcium in the blood, and can be life-threatening. Do you have any ideas on how to get her system back into balance? I would greatly appreciate any suggestions. She is 50 years old, and also suffers from severe hot flashes, as well as problems with her back.

Terry

The calcium is in the blood as free calcium because it isn't being bound properly before it is absorbed through the intestines. Calcium has to be bound before it can be absorbed and properly utilized by tissues.

You can determine the level of free (unbound) calcium by taking the amount of phosphorus in the blood and multiplying it by 2.5. This gives you the predicted calcium. Take the serum calcium result and subtract the predicted calcium result. This will tell you how much of the calcium in the blood is unbound.

One cause of unbound calcium is leaky gut syndrome. When the intestinal membranes become too permeable, due to damage from chronic inflammation, the calcium is absorbed into the blood stream too quickly and doesn't get bonded to other organic compounds for proper delivery.

So, the first thing I would try is taking Kudzu/St. John's Wort, because this formula reduces intestinal inflammation and tones the intestinal membranes to reduce gut leakage. I would also add Vitamin B-12 as this helps with transportation across intestinal membranes.

Calcium also binds with lipids (or fats) and sometimes there aren't enough good fats in the diet for proper absorption. Omega 3 essential fatty acids may be helpful in this case.

Also, the fats have to be properly emulsified by the bile for absorption. If there are problems with the gallbladder, the calcium can't bind properly to the lipids. Cholagogue herbs that stimulate the flow of bile (turmeric, fringetree, dandelion, barberry, yellow dock, etc.) can be helpful here along with Gall Bladder Formula and/or Hi Lipase.

When calcium elevates in the blood, there also can be a magnesium deficiency. A deficiency of magnesium prevents the calcium and lipoproteins from being drawn through the intestinal membrane. This typically means there are problems with the anterior pituitary which regulates this process. Digestive Bitters or MasterGland can be helpful in this situation.

Finally, there could also be an emotional cause. High calcium can be a sign that she is holding onto negative thoughts that constrict her. Having possessive tendencies would also cause this rigidity.

Plaque Build-up on Teeth

I have a 13-year-old girl who has an absolutely terrible build-up of tartar which her dentist says is caused by an over-producing salivary gland...something about the saliva being high in minerals.

Her mom said when she took her back to the dentist for a filling - after a cleaning less than a week before - the tartar had already started to build back up. The dentist said he'd never seen anything like it.

The mom is asking if I have anything that will help with this problem.

Teri

A high level of VLDL cholesterol will contribute to the development of plaque on the teeth. It usually indicates plaque build up in all parts of the body. The Chinese Red Yeast Rice along with CoQ10 might be helpful.

A combination of Black Walnut and White Oak Bark makes an excellent tooth powder for brushing the teeth and helping to eliminate plaque build-up.

If there are too many minerals in the saliva, this could indicate a high level of mineral congestion in the lymphatic system. The pituitary and adrenals regulate fluid/mineral balance, so you might want to take a look at her glandular function and her lymphatics as well.

Xango versus Thai-Go

I just had a Xango distributor call. She said she wanted to know how we could prove that Thai-go really is higher in xanthones since Xango is telling her the study was flawed in some way. I didn't really know how to reply to that one other than to tell her about NSP quality in general and NSP's history. She did go ahead and order a case to try in comparison with Xango because it is less expensive. Anyone know how to respond to that in the future?

Nicole

I would contact health sciences for help on this one, but I think you handled it well. She can directly compare the products and see which one works better for her. Plus, NSP has a much wider variety of options.

From what I understand, the extraction method and the part of the fruit from they are extracting makes a huge difference in the product. There is a higher potency of

xanthones in the pericarp of the mangosteen. The Xango ingredient list says their product contains a puree from the whole fruit, plus an extract of the pericarp. I think we use the fruit blended with more of the pericarp. The pericarp or rind does have a more bitter taste, but gets masked with the other flavors.

I have tried Xango and it is full of sugars, probably natural, but it is still more sugary. Xango's ingredients include apple juice concentrate, pear juice concentrate, grape juice concentrate, pear puree, blueberry juice concentrate, raspberry juice concentrate, strawberry juice concentrate, cranberry juice concentrate, cherry juice concentrate, citric acid, natural flavor, pectin, xanthan gum, sodium benzoate and potassium sorbate.

Thai-Go does contain some fruit juices, but the content of fruit juice seems much higher in Xango. Thai-Go is also different because NSP has added several herbs. Thai-Go includes wolfberry (also known in Chinese medicine as Lycium), which is one of the richest sources of vitamin C of any food. It also contains sea buckthorn, which is rich in vitamins E, K and has a high flavenoid content. Thai-Go also has the added polyphenol properties of green tea. So, Thai-Go appears to have a wider range of antioxidants. This may be why NSP's Thai-Go tested as having more antioxidant activity in an independent study.

Xango lists pectin, xanthan gum and two preservatives as ingredients. Thai-Go doesn't contain any preservatives. And I don't think Xango has the "guaranteed pure" on their label that Thai-Go does, either.

Scar Tissue

I just got a call from someone who asked what to do about internal scar tissue. Do you have any suggestions?

Marilyn

I would use Nature's Fresh internally and Helichrysum essential oil topically. Helichrysum dissolves scar tissue.

Kimberly Balas is a board certified naturopath and an instructor for Tree of Light. She is also a certified iridology instructor and a board member with the International Iridology Practitioners Association (IIPA). She is available for personal consultations. To schedule a consult call Balanced Health Solutions at 321-626-9243.





Liquid Cleanse

Liquid laxative formula for cleansing the colon

Although many people think of colon health as something embarrassing or funny, bowel function is just as vital to health as good nutrition or exercise. When the colon isn't working properly, waste can build up, slowing digestion and hindering the absorption of nutrients. Toxins can be absorbed into the blood stream and damage other body systems. So, to maintain optimal health, it's important to eliminate waste from the colon regularly.

NSP's Liquid Cleanse provides beneficial ingredients that support normal bowel elimination. In addition to stimulating bowel evacuations, Liquid Cleanse contains ingredients to stimulate liver and urinary detoxification. This liquid cleansing formula is especially helpful for people who may have trouble swallowing pills or tablets.

It contains the following ingredients.

Senna

Senna has long been used as an efficient stimulant laxative for occasional irregularity or cleansing programs. Senna contains anthraquinone glycosides (found in other laxative herbs such as cascara sagrada) and sennosides that irritate the colon, producing a bowel movement about ten hours after ingestion. These compounds also promote soft stools by slowing re-absorption of fluids into the body. Senna is used in the medical field to cleanse the bowels in preparation for a colonoscopy and has been shown to outperform the synthetic laxative PEG in cleansing the colon.

Aloe Vera

Aloe vera acts as an emollient that soothes the digestive tract and mucous membranes. It reduces intestinal inflammation.

Cinnamon

Cinnamon is an aromatic herb that stimulates digestive action. It is a carminative, which expels intestinal gas, and an antispasmodic, which reduces muscle spasms. Antispasmodic herbs help counter the tendency of anthraquinone bearing laxatives (like senna) to cause intestinal cramping.

Fennel

Fennel has long been used as a digestive remedy to settle the stomach, relieve bloating and gas and ease digestive cramps and colic.

Ginger

Ginger stimulates the flow of saliva, bile and gastric juices. It also increases circulation in the digestive organs.

Capsicum

Like ginger, capsicum stimulates the flow of saliva, bile and gastric juices; and improves blood flow.

Barberry

Barberry root bark helps by stimulating the flow of bile from the liver. It also helps reduce inflammation and infection in the digestive tract.

Dandelion

Dandelion root helps the liver and gallbladder to remove waste.

Corn Silk

Corn silk is a mild diuretic, stimulating urinary flow, and is soothing to irritated membranes.

Flavorings

Red raspberry fruit and citrus extract provide important antioxidants and give a pleasant taste to the formula.

Usage

Take one ounce (30 ml) daily, as part of a personal cleansing program. The product is easiest to take when added to juice, and makes a good addition to a fiber drink. Liquid Cleanse is for occasional use only and is not good for long-term use. Do not use if diarrhea, loose stools or abdominal pain are present. If you are pregnant, nursing or if any medical condition exists see your health care provider before taking Liquid Cleanse.

Sources of Additional Information:

Foundations of Health: Liver and Digestive Herbal by Christopher Hobbs
Coming Clean by Steven Horne

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LBS II

Time-tested herbal laxative formula for the lower bowel

LBS II has been around for a long time. Formulated by Stan Malstrom, LBS II is a lower bowel formula designed to stimulate intestinal peristalsis and improve bowel function. It contains several laxative herbs, along with herbs that stimulate production of digestive enzymes and bile. It also has mild diuretic and blood-purifying effects.

Generally used for cleansing programs, or to relieve occasional constipation, LBS II contains the following ingredients.

Cascara Sagrada Bark

Termed “sacred bark” by Spanish settlers, cascara was boiled and used by early settlers in the West as a laxative and bowel tonic. It contains anthraquinone glycosides which stimulate intestinal peristalsis and increase evacuation. Cascara also increases the flow of bile and stimulates the flow of secretions of the stomach, pancreas and liver.

Barberry Bark

Used by Native Americans in the treatment of liver ailments, barberry helps remove toxins and improves the function of the liver, gallbladder and kidneys. It contains berberine, an alkaloid also found in goldenseal and Oregon grape, which helps fight infection and reduce intestinal inflammation.

Buckthorn Bark

A close relative of cascara sagrada, buckthorn has the same laxative and bile-stimulating properties.

Turkey Rhubarb Root

Originally imported from Europe to treat constipation, rhubarb root has a homeostatic or balancing effect on the bowels. It helps to move the bowels in cases of constipation and works as an astringent in cases of diarrhea.

Licorice Root

A famous herb in many medical traditions, licorice helps to balance the glandular system, improve energy levels and boost immunity. It has a very mild laxative action, and also reduces intestinal irritation and inflammation.

Couch Grass Herb

A perennial grass considered a troublesome weed throughout many parts of the world, couch grass has a beneficial effect on the urinary system. It has been used to treat bladder inflammation, frequent or painful urination, blood in the urine, kidney and bladder disorders, and prostate diseases such as benign

prostate gland tumors. It has also recently been shown to have antibiotic effects against bacteria and molds.

Capsicum Fruit

Commonly known as red or cayenne pepper, capsicum is used as a catalyst herb in many herbal combinations. As a digestive aid, it promotes greater assimilation of energy and nutrients from food, while stimulating circulation.

Red Clover Tops

Red clover is a blood purifier, and helps the body discharge nitrogenous waste, aids in cleansing impurities from the liver and lymphatic system, and helps slow the spread of infection.

Ginger Root

A digestive system stimulant, ginger expels gas from the bowels, and stimulates circulation to the digestive organs.

Usage

LBS-II is available both in capsule and vegi-tab form (a compressed vegetarian tablet). It is best taken with lots of water and bulking herbs like psyllium. Since the laxative herbs it contains work after about 8-10 hours, it is best taken in the evening to promote a morning evacuation, or first thing in the morning. General amount is 1-4 capsules or vegi-tabs per dose. It is not a good idea to exceed 4 per day.

Cautions

The anthraquinones in cascara sagrada which are responsible for its laxative effects can be transferred to babies through the milk of nursing mothers, so use with caution when nursing. Long-term use of any stimulant laxative can eventually decrease muscle tone of the colon. These laxatives should be for occasional use only. If one's bowel does not return to normal function, look deeper into the underlying causes of the constipation. Typical problems include lack of digestive enzymes, poor liver function, not drinking enough water, lack of dietary fiber, magnesium deficiency, sedentary lifestyle (insufficient exercise) and stress (muscle spasms).

Selected References

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- The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs edited by Sarah Bunney (New York, NY: Dorset Press, 1984).

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Nature's Field Production Staff

President: Steven H. Horne

General Manager: Darla Steiner

Assistant Writer and Editor:

Mark Montgomery

Associate Editors:

Carolyn Hughes

Hugh Hughes

Sharon Grimes

Writer and Technical Editor:

Kimberly Balas

Computers and Design: David Horne

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