

---

# American Botanical Council

## HerbClip

FILE: Kava kava  
*(Piper methysticum)*

---

**Date:** June 13, 1996 HC 6-13-6-2

**To:** General Distribution

**Re:** **Profile of Kava Kava**

Blumenthal, Mark. Kava kava: The Pacific Herb. *Whole Foods*, April 1996, pp. 51-54.

“For several years now,” writes Mark Blumenthal, Executive Director of the American Botanical Council, “kava has been on my list of ‘up-and-coming herbs for the ‘90s.’” Kava (*Piper methysticum*) is native to the islands of Melanesia and Polynesia in the South Pacific where the root has been used as a medicine and as an intoxicating drink for ceremonial purposes. The compounds in kava believed to be bioactive are called kavalactones. Pharmacological studies have shown that these compounds have sedative and hypnotic effects, anticonvulsant and musculo-skeletal relaxing activity, and local anesthetic properties.

Traditionally, the root has been used medicinally throughout many South Pacific cultures: for gonorrhoea in Samoa, for sore throats and toothache in New Guinea, for rheumatism, bronchitis, and gonorrhoea in Tahiti, and for urinary tract problems in the Cook Islands. The leaves have also been used medicinally: for bronchitis in New Caledonia, and for teething infants in Tonga. For ceremonial purposes, the root is valued for its cerebral stimulant effect and for its ability to steady the pulse and promote perspiration. In Europe, kava is being used to treat anxiety and nervous tension disorders. Unlike conventional drugs used for this treatment, kava has the unique ability to give, in the words of herbalist Bill Brevoort, “utter relaxation while at the same time allowing such clear, penetrating mindfulness.” This claim is supported by the results of one placebo-controlled clinical study with 58 patients. According to the German Commission E monograph, kava is relatively safe, producing temporary adverse side effects in only rare cases. It is approved in Germany as a nonprescription drug to reduce anxiety.