

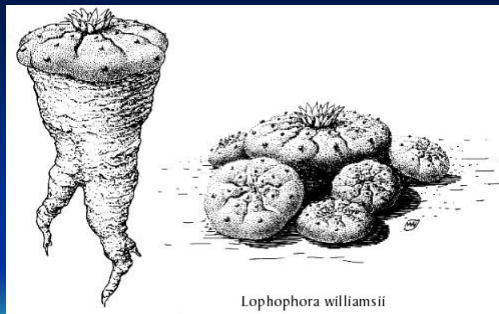
PEYOTE

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Description:

- Peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) is a small, grey-green, round cactus with grayish-white fuzzy tufts instead of spines and occasionally flowers.
- It rarely rises more than an inch or so above the soil surface.
- The largest part of the cactus is actually underground in the long, carrot-like root.

PEYOTE



Lophophora williamsii

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Lophophora williamsii
Photo by Skeps © 2007 Knowledge.org

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Lophophora williamsii
Photo by Farmer Duda © 2011 Emerald.org

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- The above ground portion is the “button” which is cut and consumed either fresh or dried.
- Peyote is a native cactus of the Sonoran Desert. It grows wild in portions of the Rio Grande Valley in Southern Texas, and south into Central Mexico.
- The plant is very slow growing. It can take 13 years or more to mature.

- Over 50 chemically related alkaloid compounds have been isolated in peyote.
- 30 are thought to have some psychoactive properties.
- The main psychoactive compound is mescaline.
- Mescaline is chemically very similar to the neurotransmitter substance, norepinephrine.
- Mescaline was first extracted from peyote in 1896.
- This was the first hallucinogenic compound to be chemically isolated.

- About 350 mg of mescaline is required for a psychotropic experience, although definite effects can be felt from as little as 100 mg.
- It has been noted that the peyote experience is quantitatively somewhat different than that of pure mescaline.
- Myths concerning the presence of strychnine being present in the tufts or flesh of peyote are often circulated in the common lore, but in reality there is no strychnine in peyote.

Background and Historical Use:

- Peyote has a long history of use as a medicinal and sacramental plant.
- Dried peyote has been found within a Texas cave and it has been dated at approximately 7000 years old.
- Archaeological evidence indicates that peyote was a sacred plant of the Aztecs.
- Peyote traditions later spread north to the Plains Indians.

- Several of the peyote cults combined to form the Native American Church, which was first chartered in Oklahoma in 1918. In 1970 a formal act of the U.S. Congress recognized the right of church members to use peyote as a sacrament.
- Both peyote and mescaline are illegal under the statutes of the Federal government and most States, except to members of the Native American Church. Members are not permitted to use mescaline.

The Peyote Experience:

- Peyote is harvested by slicing the top portion of the cactus.
- The crown, when cut from the root and dried, is then called the *peyote* or *mescal button*.
- An average dried button is about the diameter of a quarter and weighs about 2 grams. Individual buttons can contain anywhere from 20 to 60 mg of mescaline. A normal dosage would be 6 to 15 buttons.

- The most common method of use is simply to chew up and swallow the dried buttons.
- Peyote may also be taken as a concentrated tea, and occasionally fresh plants are consumed.
- It is generally recommended that peyote buttons be eaten gradually, during a period of an hour, or taken in several small doses. This is done to reduce the shock of the alkaloid to the system.

- Nausea or queasiness are often experienced half an hour or so after taking peyote. This usually passes in less than an hour. Native Americans fast for at least a day before taking peyote.
- About half an hour after ingesting the buttons the first effects are felt.
- There is a feeling of strange intoxication and shifting consciousness with minor perceptual changes.
- There may also be strong physical effects, including respiratory pressure, muscle tension (especially face and neck muscles), and queasiness or possible nausea.

- Any unpleasant sensations should disappear within an hour.
- After this the state of altered consciousness begins to manifest itself.
- The experience may vary with the individual, but among the possible occurrences are feelings of inner tranquility, oneness with life, heightened awareness, and rapid thought flow.

- During the next several hours these effects will deepen and become more visual.
- After several more hours the intensity of the experience gradually relaxes. Thought becomes less rapid and diffuse and more ordered.
- In the Navajo peyote ritual this change of thought flow is used wisely.
- During the first part of the ceremony the participants submit to the feeling and let the peyote teach them.

- During the latter part of the ritual the mind turns to thoughtful contemplation and understanding with the conscious intellect what the peyote has taught the subconscious mind.
- The entire experience may last from 6 to 12 hours depending upon the individual and the amount of the plant consumed.
- After all the peyote effects have passed there is no comedown. One is likely to feel pleasantly relaxed and much at peace with the world.

Peyote Use in Native American Religion and Medicine:

- The religious use peyote is very ancient.
- Mexican natives, predominately the Tarahumara and the Huichol peoples, may have introduced peyote to the Mescalero Apache, who then introduced it to the Kiowa and Comanche tribes around 1870.
- Today, it is the Kiowa-Comanche type of peyote ceremony that, with slight modifications, prevails north of the Mexican border.

- Today, peyote is employed as a religious sacrament among more than forty Native American tribes in many parts of the United States and western Canada.
- The peyote ceremony in the Native American Church is a prayer meeting that typically lasts one night from sunset to sunrise.
- Ingestion of peyote buttons is used as a sacrament in the ceremony. The use of peyote by the Native American has been compared to the Christian use of bread and wine – symbols of a deity.

- The peyote ceremony is usually held in a teepee, hogan, or peyote house especially set aside for that purpose.
- Christian elements are often significantly present, depending on the particular tribe or group leader.
- Central tenets of the NAC usually involve avoidance of alcohol, devotion to family, and right living in general.
- The proper ritual behavior must be observed before participating in a peyote ceremony.

- Physically, one must be clean, having bathed and put on clean clothes.
- Spiritually, one must put away all evil thoughts.
- Psychologically, one must be conscious of his personal inadequacy, humble, sincere in wanting to obtain the benefits of peyote, and concentrate on it.
- The central doctrine of the NAC is learning to live life well (which involves avoidance of alcohol, devotion to family and right living.)

- Physically, peyote is used as a divine healer and amulet (a button is kept at home or on the person to protect from danger.)
- Spiritually, peyote is used to obtain knowledge (known as learning from peyote).

Studies on the Long-Term Use of Peyote Among Native Americans:

- A study published in November 2005 by researchers at the McLean Hospital and Harvard Medical School found no mental or behavioral problems associated with long-term use of peyote among members of the Native American Church.

- Peyote users scored significantly better than non-users on the “general positive affect” and “psychological well-being” measures of the Rand Mental Health Inventory (RMHI), a standard instrument used to diagnose psychological problems and determine overall mental health.
- In contrast, alcohol abusers did significantly worse than the comparison group (non-users) in all measures of the RMHI.

- Researchers cautioned that the results of the study do not generalize to other hallucinogenic drugs, such as LSD.
- The hallucinogens that are typically abused on the street are LSD and psilocybin. These are indole molecules, which differ from the mescaline molecule.
- So even if it is true that peyote has no long-term neuropsychological toxicity, you still cannot leap to the conclusion that indoles lack such toxicity.

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