Kava Encyclopedia Article

Kava

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Contents

Kava Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Kava.....3

Kava

A drink prepared from the root of the Australasian pepper shrub *Piper methysticum*. The word *kava*, which is Polynesian for bitter, pungent, is given to the drink because of its strong peppery taste. Several variations of this drink were once used widely as social intoxicants in the islands of the South Pacific, particularly Fiji. The quality of the drink improves with the age of the root, and the roots are generally at least four years old before they are used. After the root is cut and crushed or grated, the active components are extracted by soaking the preparation in water.

Common effects of kava include general muscular relaxation, euphoria, and loss of fatigue. Visual and auditory effects are also common. In large quantities kava can induce muscular incoordination and ultimately stupor.

While no ALKALOIDS or glycosides have been found in kava, several aromatically substituted α-pyrones, including kawain, dihydrokawain, methysticin, and yangonin, have been isolated from the extracted root. Other as-yet-unidentified components of kava may also be important in the effects of the drink.

See Also

Plants, Drugs From)

Bibliography

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