

[IMAGE]

How To Buy Saw Palmetto

By Tina Beaudoin, ND

When consumers demand lower costs for a product and supply is limited, the adulteration of ingredients can become tempting. Adulteration of goods has been part of commerce since the beginning of civilization and saw palmetto products are no exception to this practice.

Saw Palmetto extract (*Serenoa repens*) supports healthy enzymatic activity that is associated with balanced hormone function in men. It is harvested from the ripe berries of a fan palm that is primarily sourced from Florida. The supply of *S. repens* extract is dependent upon a relatively short harvesting period which is only 2 to 3 months to ensure the concentration of the active constituents.

In 2000, one study found that 2 out of the 6 tested saw palmetto retail products were adulterated. Saw Palmetto extract (SPE) has been adulterated in a variety of ways that vary in sophistication. One means is to simply dilute the extract with inexpensive plant oils. A more cunning method of adulteration involves diluting the product with a specifically formulated blend of oils that mirrors the fatty acid profile of Saw Palmetto and will pass a standard plant identification test. The charade can be further enhanced with an addition of organic acids that would even hoodwink the most advanced testing methodologies.

How To Choose Your Saw Palmetto Extract

In 2009, a study was conducted with the aim of discerning reliable methodology to detect fraud in saw palmetto extracts. The study found adulterated products and determined that the most reliable means to detect fraud was via the utilization of free fatty acid profiling. The limitation of this test is that it cannot be used on blended products such as those with other oils, fats, etc. However, free fatty acid profiling can be utilized when testing bulk SPE or unblended products. One option for consumers might be to avoid SPE products that include an oil among their inactive ingredients unless you are confident of their quality control procedures or have quality validation from an independent source. Be sure you are getting what you pay and when in doubt, seek the assistance of a Registered Herbalist, Naturopathic Doctor, or other qualified healthcare practitioner.

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