



Witch Hazel

“[Witch Hazel](#)” is one of the few products that is FDA approved and endorsed by real witches.” It is also a lovely native landscape bush or tree!

Witch hazel is a most unique plant. Bushes or trees, they all have stunning fall foliage and most notably, colorful tassel-like flowers that cling to the branches, blooming at very odd times. *Hamamelis virginiana* has bright yellow flowers in the fall after all the leaves have dropped. Imagine the surprise for the first person spotting that anomaly! If they missed that bloom, there are other varieties that bloom in the early spring *before* the leaves—a pleasant surprise like Pussywillows! These can grow 10-20 feet tall although there are more compact new varieties.

The preferred [garden setting](#) for both our native *Hamamelis* species is partial sun and moist, (not wet) slightly acidic, organically rich soils. Most varieties dislike clay soils. Individual plants are showy enough to stand on their own, but witch-hazel also works well when multiple specimens are planted together or in combination with viburnums, dogwoods or hollies. Many will sucker freely aiding in the informal hedge look. They are relatively care free and rarely bothered by pests, though the deer in our area like to challenge such assertions.

Chicago, IL (like us) is in USDA Hardiness Zone 5. The [Chicago Botanical Garden](#) lists the most Witch Hazel varieties that I have found.

Besides their landscape value, Witch Hazel has some rather magical uses too. Branches of *H. virginiana* were used as "divining rods" to locate underground sources of water. The [Mohegans](#) are believed to be the first to introduce this to the English settlers. Curtis Strong of East Hampton, CT, has successfully used Y-shaped Witch Hazel sticks to dowse quite successfully for years.

Witch Hazel is also used medicinally and has been since the Native Americans used it to treat skin ulcers and sores, in sweat lodges to soothe sore muscles, and other topical applications as well. It is an astringent.

Witch Hazel has a strong Connecticut connection. The Atlantic interviewed the world's largest maker of witch hazel products, [American Distilling](#), which just happens to be located in East Hampton, CT.

Connecticut's first distillery was in Essex, opened by T.N. Dickinson who collected witch hazel grown by area residents and distilled it. He branched out to several CT locations including East Hampton. Eventually he passed it on to his sons who disagreed and divided the company. It is now American Distilling located in East Hampton, CT. When not dowsing, Mr. Strong and his sons harvest 80 tons of witch Hazel each year and sell it to American Distilling.

A Couple More Thoughts...

On March 13, Adam Wheeler from Broken Arrow Nursery will present a program on witch hazels to the Haddam Garden Club. The program will begin around 11:30 and is open to the public. A \$5 donation is suggested.

"Digging In" recipe of the month:

FOOD PROCESSOR BROWNIES

Submitted by Gail Christie

"Incredible easy and delicious" GC

Preheat oven to 350. Grease 9" square pan with butter or margarine. The food processor equipped with chopping blade is used for the bowl. Simply add ingredients in order listed and process as directed.

Process on/off 20 seconds:

1 cup + 2 TBSP sugar

1 stick of butter cut into small pieces

Add and turn on for 15 seconds:

2 eggs

1/8 tsp salt

Add and turn on/off until it disappears:

½ cup of cocoa

1 cup nuts

Finally add and process on/off until it disappears:

½ cup flour

Scrape into the greased pan and level with a spatula

Bake at 350 for 35 minutes