



## **Bitter Almond & Laetrile**

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**What is it?** This fruit nut is closely related to the peach, apricot and cherry. Unlike the fruits listed the outer layer of the bitter almond is not edible. Bitter almond should not be confused with sweet almonds, which are edible. Bitter almond contains amygdalin which produces cyanide which combined with water. Laetrile, an alternative cancer drug which is derived from amygdalin has been marketed in Mexico and other countries as a form of cancer treatment.

**What is it Used for?** Bitter almond and Laetrile has been marketed as an antibiotic, anti-inflammatory, anti-itch, cough suppressant, local anesthetic, muscle relaxant, pain suppressant and sedative.

**Typical Doses:** Due to potential toxicity, there is no accepted standard dose for bitter almond.

**Safety:** Bitter almond and Laetrile are considered to be unsafe in any form due to its potential for causing cyanide poisoning. Other side effects include: dilated pupils, dizziness, drooping eyelids, headache, fatigue, muscle weakness, increased respiration, slowed brain function, nausea, and vomiting.

**Interactions with Herbs and Drugs:** Bitter almond may increase the amount of drowsiness of drugs including benzodiazepines, barbiturates and some antidepressants. Bitter almond also negatively interacts with the following herbs: California poppy, capsicum, catnip, dogwood, German chamomile, goldenseal, kava, lavender aromatherapy, lemon balm, sage, sassafras, skullcap, Siberian ginseng, St. John's wort, stinging nettle, valerian, wild carrot, and wild lettuce.

**Bottom Line:** Bitter almond and Laetrile are not safe for consumption. There is no evidence of anticancer effects with either herbal supplement. Therefore these supplements should not be promoted for an alternative cancer medication.

[www.mcp.edu/herbal/default.htm](http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/default.htm): Longwood Herbal Taskforce: accessed 5/21/05  
[www.mdanderson.org/departments/cimer](http://www.mdanderson.org/departments/cimer) : M.D. Anderson Cancer Center: accessed on 5/21/05