Plants and the Olympic games

* Winners in the ancient Olympic games received a crown of bay leaves.
* Some of the modern Olympic games have been marred by athletes taking plant derived performance enhancing drugs.
	+ The winner of the 1904 marathon took strychnine ( extracted from the seeds of the tropical plant genus *Strychnos*) and brandy made from grapes.
	+ A cyclist taking amphetamines (synthesised from ephedrine, present in the sap of the primitive plant species *Ephedra*) died in the 1960 games.
	+ In 1988 Benjamin Johnson was stripped of his 100metre Gold Medal for use of the anabolic steroid stanazolol which can be made from yams.
* Dioscorides’ *Materia Medica* (circa 80 CE) lists some plants that might have been used to enhance performance.
	+ An extract made by boiling the berries of the bay tree and flowers of dillmarinated in olive oil could be rubbed on to ‘lessen weariness’.
	+ The dried berries of the honeysuckle,marinated in wine were recommended ‘to abate fatigue’

Courtesy Dr H Oakley

Plants have also been used to improve health and well being in general