

NEEM

The healing powers of nature

A few weeks ago, a friend of mine pointed to a large tree on the street and said “look, that’s a Neem tree.” I looked up and saw a tree that I thought looked ‘average’. I would not have given that tree a second look if I hadn’t known about its healing qualities. I have read a lot of literature about the benefits of the Neem tree, but seeing it standing on the side of the street was a different experience.

The Neem tree can be seen all over Bahrain. It is native to India and Burma, where it has always been honoured as a health provider for plants, animals, and humans. In some places, it is even referred to as “the village pharmacy” and rightly so, since many of its benefits have been verified by scientific methods.

The word *neem* comes from Sanskrit and translates into “the healer and illness reliever”. The tree thrives in poor soil and hot climates; it resembles the shape of an oak with light-brown to yellow wood and feather-like rigid leaves. It produces large white flowers and bears fruits which grow to the size and shape of olives. The seeds, roots, bark and leaves have traditionally been used therapeutically.

Neem Leaves and Extract

Neem leaves contain several active ingredients that are used in medicine and cosmetics as well as in plant protection.

According to Ayurvedic healing, Neem is a powerful blood cleanser and detoxifier to the system. It has an anti-fever effect and clears toxins in most inflammatory skin conditions. Extracts of the leaves and bark have strong anti-bacterial, anti-fungal and anti-viral activities.

Neem has been found to be deadly to 14 different common fungi, including those that cause intestinal tract infections, infections of the bronchi, lungs and mucus membranes, lesions of the mouth, vagina and intestinal tract (Candida), athlete’s foot and ringworm.

Neem is also effective with Arthritis, Malaria, Rheumatism, Ulcers and Stress. Neem boosts immunity by stimulating the production of T-cells to fight infections. An alcohol extract of the Neem seed kernel is also effective in neutralising the Herpes virus. Neem solutions are currently being tested for their effects on cancer, diabetes, heart disease and AIDS.

A paste made from Neem leaves is rubbed directly onto skin lesions caused by smallpox, chickenpox and warts. Mosquito bites and other skin wounds are also treated by applying Neem leaves or Neem extracts.

Other products made from Neem extracts include soaps, toothpaste, facial lotions, and nail oils used for cleansing and care.

Neem bark and branches

Neem bark and branches have traditionally been used for oral hygiene and treating gum infections because of their antiseptic qualities. In some areas, especially the middle east, Neem branches often replace toothbrushes. Neem has also been processed into toothpaste derived from the active ingredients found in the outer-most layer of the bark.

Neem trees also provide excellent building material, and the wood can be manufactured into furniture. Neem wood furniture has the added pest control characteristic of being resistant to termites and wood worms.

Neem blossoms

The Neem tree blossoms for the first time after about three-to five years. The blossoms are white, somewhat similar to a lilac, but more delicate. Their slightly aromatic scent attracts insects for pollination. The honey of bees that collect pollen almost exclusively from Neem flowers is considered a delicacy.

After the Neem tree blossoms, small fruits form. These fruits grow to the size and shape of olives. Once they ripen, they turn yellow and soften. Although I have never tasted them myself, a friend reports that the fruits have a sweet-sour flavour. However, the fruit is not easily separated from the core and only tastes good in its fully ripe stage. So they cannot always be eaten like cherries by spitting out the pit. If, when eating these fruits, you hit the core, the enjoyable taste is over. The seeds, although not toxic, taste so bitter that even the most bitter medicine tastes good in comparison. Only people experienced in eating the fruit are able to fully enjoy it, most others will want to spit it out immediately. So, if you're feeling adventurous, try it for yourself and give me your feedback!

Neem Core and Seeds

The core of the Neem fruit contains two or three seeds. The seeds contain a large portion of plant oil that is made up of approximately forty different ingredients. Neem oil can be extracted from the seeds by pressing. Neem oil has a scent somewhere between that of peanuts and garlic. It does not taste good, and that's why it is not used as food but only as grease, wax production, soap production, and as fuel (for example, oil lamps).

The most frequently used part of the tree are the seeds. They contain a large mix of ingredients that can be used for medical as well as cosmetic purposes.

Neem seeds are often used as natural insecticides for their ability to control many types of plant eaters and parasites. They are the ideal natural insecticide because they are non-toxic to humans, not harmful to the environment, and quickly break down into natural substances.

More than two hundred types of insects as well as a number of mites, worms, fungi, bacteria, and even some viruses react to the ingredients in Neem. These creatures are not killed right away, but they turn 'lazy', stop eating, and no longer lay eggs. So although they stay alive, they no longer cause any damage.

A watered-down solution of Neem seeds or prepared Neem shampoos can also be used to wash down lice, scabies, mites, and fleas.

Neem as contraception

Neem has also been found to be an effective birth control agent for both men and women. In the first century B.C., an Indian physician, gave a detailed method for using neem for contraception. Cotton soaked in neem oil was kept in the vagina for fifteen minutes before intercourse; this killed the sperm. Since then, years of study have also resulted in a vaginal cream with both spermicidal and antimicrobial action, where the neem oil killed sperm in the vagina within 30 seconds of contact and was effective for up to 5 hours, without any known hormonal or other side effects.

Many women in Madagascar chew a handful of Neem leaves every day, which, according them, "prevents pregnancies." In the case of unwanted pregnancies, Neem is said to be capable of inducing a miscarriage.

Furthermore, Neem kernels produce a brown, bitter, fixed oil called Oil of Mergosa. This oil possesses antifungal and antiseptic qualities and is considered to have antifertility properties. It is a very powerful spermicide with no side effects. For men, a tiny amount of injected Neem oil might be able to provide up to 8 months of birth control.

Article – Alia Almoayed

Both in India and the United States, trials show that Neem extract reduces fertility in male monkeys without inhibiting libido or sperm production. In some Indian studies, Neem leaf tablets taken for one month produced reversible male infertility but did not affect sperm production or libido. Does this show promise for a male birth control Pill?

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