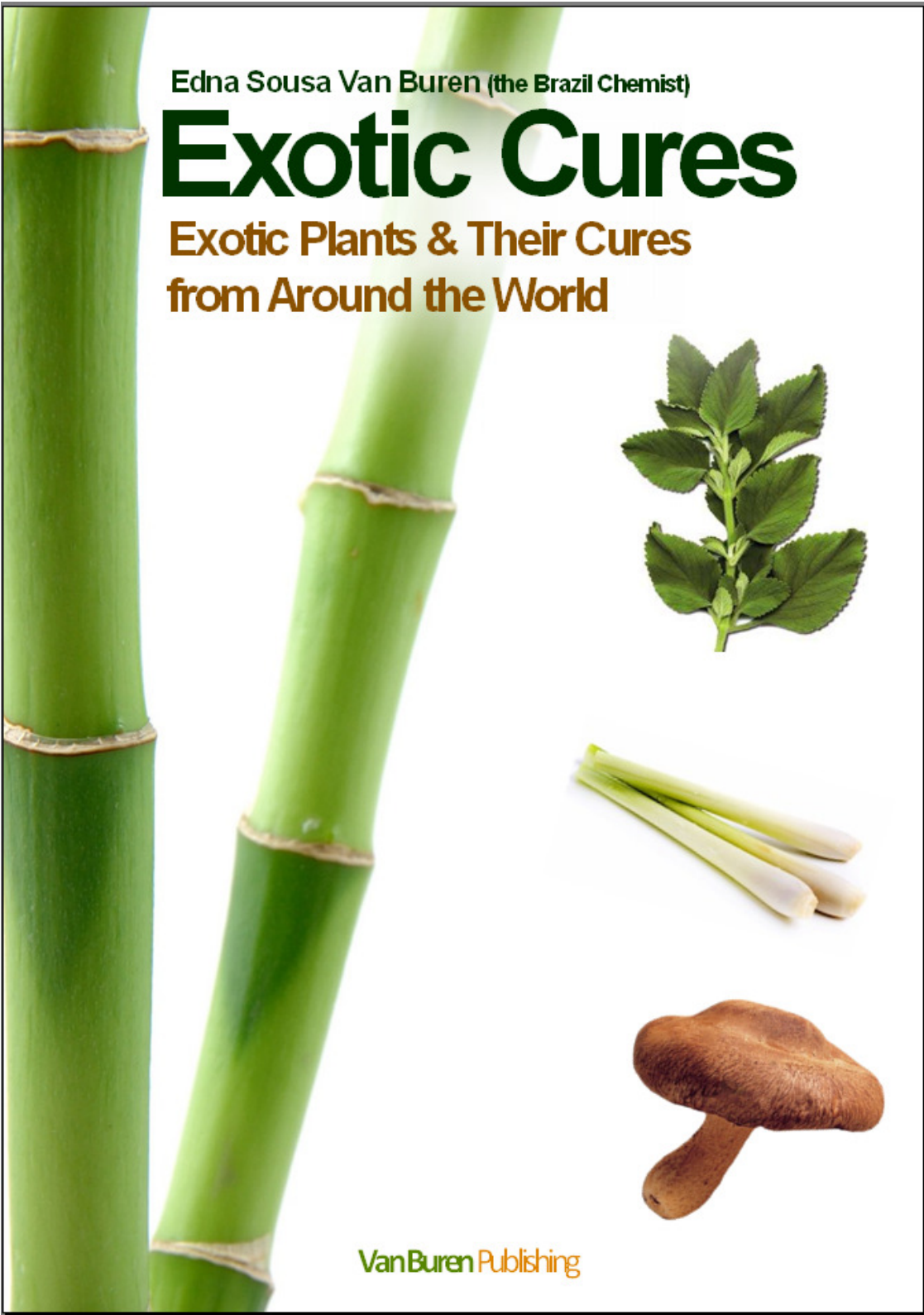


Edna Sousa Van Buren (the Brazil Chemist)

Exotic Cures

Exotic Plants & Their Cures
from Around the World



VanBuren Publishing

Exotic Cures

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**Written by: Edna Sousa Van Buren
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Exotic Cures
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1

Dragon's Blood As Rare & Special As It's Name

It's called Dragon's Blood, the infamous ingredient from the Rainforest...and it's about as mysterious and difficult to find as a dragon. I must confess that I never heard of this plant before, but when attending a New Jersey Suppliers Day, I came across this old new anti-aging ingredient from South America represented by a European company.

So, I'm from South America and I decided to catch this dragon by the tail, as you might say, and find out about this special substance.

Its scientific name is *Croton lechleri*, and it's a tree that grows in some Amazonian countries such as Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The name was given because of a liquid or resinous sap with scarlet color that looks a bit like blood. High in astringent substances, its bark or resin has been used by the Amazon indigenous as an anti-inflammatory — both topically and internally.

I'll focus on the cosmetic use of this natural ingredient.

Studies show the **Sangre de drago** also contains chemicals compounds as proanthocyanidins, alkaloids, lignans and phenols, helpful in healing wounds and regenerating damaged skin. As a cosmetic chemist I must say it's a multi-functional ingredient, being the source of many other amazing "beauty maker" substances, such as Pycnogenol, gallocathecin, tannin cathecin, betaine, -... Think of Pine Bark Extract, Green Tea Extract and Linseed all in one product?!

That's worthy of the name Dragon's Blood!

Dragon's Blood has been used in several anti-aging formulas to repair skin and fill wrinkles, as well for acne and rosacea.



2

Buriti

The Brazilian Tree of Life

The Brazilian Cerrado (high desert) has been a holy place for botanist and green cosmetic chemists. Occupying 20 percent of the nation's territory, the Brazilian Cerrado, located in the Central East region of Brazil, is very diverse and has the most interesting fauna and flora in the country. It's a savannah-like swamp in one season and very dry in another. Among many beautiful species was born the palm tree, called Buriti meaning *Tree of Life* in Tupi language.

The government headquarters in Brasilia is called *Palacio do Buriti* (Buriti Palace), named after the most abundant tree in the region.

The entire tree has multiple uses, which makes it very sustainable and planet friendly. The fibers are used for handcrafts (bags, jewels, rags, clothes and hammocks); the heart is eaten as “heart of palm” (or *palmito* in Portuguese); the fruits give off oil used in the culinary arts and as a natural medicine for detox and insect bites. The fruit is also found in arts & crafts and fashion accessories.

Buriti plant is abundant in Brazil and has been used for centuries by the Native population. Its oil is orange-reddish in color due to the high density of carotenoids and B complex found in its composition. And that is big reason why it's oil is used in the food industry and in cosmetic for anti-aging, bath and sun block products mostly.

For beauty purposes, the oil of Buriti has high concentration of essential fatty acids, palmitic and oleic, Vitamin A, C and E, with high stability point, which is a great challenge for cosmetic formulators. So, look for beauty product with Buriti in the ingredients list, as the benefits for hair and skin are *precioso*.

3



Lemongrass The Most Versatile of Plants

I once said that my favorite exotic cure was Aloe vera. Well, that's still true. But my second favorite is lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) because it is found all over the world in almost any form — herbal tea, oil, extract, raw or dry and it's a unique plant with so many benefits for health and beauty.

Origins of Lemongrass

Lemongrass, a gramineae or grass-like plant from Asia is cultivated in many tropical countries for commercial production and individual uses. It tastes and smells terrific and is often mistaken for Citronella, which is cultivated for insects and pest repellents as its only therapeutic purpose. It so happens that both Lemongrass and Citronella have the same chemical compound. People often take Lemongrass tea to keep

the mosquitoes away (through the perspiration of citronellal, the active anti-bug ingredient in both plants). While Citronella is much stronger than Lemongrass (too strong for a tea), I never travel without my Lemongrass tea.

Benefits of Lemongrass

Lemongrass in tea form is used by many cultures as an analgesic for headaches, colds, flu, upset stomach, indigestion, insomnia, constipation and fever. In cuisine, Lemongrass gives a unique touch of freshness to Thai curry or fish stew, and is highly recommended in chicken soup or roast preparations.

The aromatic compounds of Lemongrass are citral, geraniol, nerol, myrcene, citral, citronellal and several others. They are responsible for creating the lemony smell and for the healing properties of this plant. Lemongrass also relaxes muscles, is an antibacterial, antifungal, and detox for the body, since it promotes perspiration. Applied to the skin, its extract acts to disinfect, tone and firm the skin tissue. In beauty products, it's used in soaps, cream, lotions and gels for skin disorders and anti cellulite treatments.

What Products

Plantlife has formulated vegan and handmade products with Lemongrass. From essential oil, body lotion, body wash, foam soap, to candles, body oils and much more. Plantlife uses an organic

essential oil in its products which results in more great benefits delivered to your skin.

4



Boswellia (Frankincense) The King of Fragrance for Mind and Body

The benefits of oils and incenses for mind, body and spirit have been well known for ages. And of all the oils and essences from all the ages, I'd have to say that Frankincense garners the most respect. It's the king of aroma therapy (rose oil probably being the queen) and has been used by many cultures for many purposes.

Frankincense or Boswellia is one of the gifts brought by the three wise men for Baby Jesus. But before the Western world became aware of it, the Eastern civilization was using it for centuries in sacred events and even in traditional Ayurvedic medicine in India.

The *Boswellia serrata* trees are native to Indian mountains, around Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Orissa, and the southern region. But the *Boswellia* family also grows in desert environments such as Arabia and Africa, where it was commercialized for many centuries.

Boswellia is a gum resin collected from the tree's trunk after the gum turns dry and hard. The colors of the resins vary from light gold to amber, depending on the particular harvest. This fascinating and fragrant tree was always used as an incense and an oil and is known by many names, such as Indian Frankincense, Frankincense *Boswellia*, *Olibanum*, *Olibano*, *Guggal*, and *Salalki*.

The Health Benefits of Frankincense

The main use of the *Boswellia* extract today is as an anti-inflammatory and anti arthritic, due to the presence of boswellin, the active ingredient extracted from the resin. Taken internally, the *Boswellia* regulates the liver and helps with respiratory disorders, ulcers, sclerosis, anxiety, rheumatoid arthritis, back pain and gout. Studies have shown that Boswellin also helps prevent the inflammation process, Chron's disease, chronic constipation and auto-immune diseases. It's healing properties have even been recognized officially by the FDA.

The Beauty Benefits of Frankincense

The benefits of *Boswellia* extend to topical uses and it's used in the beauty industry as a anti-aging ingredient, as the boswellic acid

causes skin cells to rejuvenate. Boswellic acid has astringent and tonic effect on the skin, without side effects, being perfect for any skin conditions, especially for mature and aging skin.

Bella Ve' Vitamin C Protect Day Cream contains Boswellia serrata gum as an active ingredient in its formula, working in synergy with Vitamins A and C to lighten dark spots and protect the skin from sun rays and photo-aging. The day cream also contains green tea leaf extract, which provides powerful antioxidants. It's also worth mentioning that the Bella Ve Day Cream has a delicious and refreshing Cucumber-Lemongrass smell, perfect for Summer days. You'll really enjoy this product and the healing benefits of Frankincense, the king of fragrances and skincare ingredients.

5



Snails for Health and Beauty

Snail eating is not just found in French cuisine. Escargots are known by different names to the Chinese, Japanese, South American and African cultures, which also enjoy the health benefits and flavor of this delicacy.

Well, I'm not going to give you a recipe for escargot. In fact, I know what you're thinking: "I'd never eat that!" Well, don't worry! You don't even need to eat them to get the best of their benefits. If the snail is good for your health, then why shouldn't it be useful for beauty too? Fact is, snail serum has been used for years in the cosmetics industry for skin disorders. It started in Europe when scientists and

dermatologists were looking for an efficient product for skin recovery after traumas such as severe burns and surgeries. And the good news is...you don't even have to kill those little creepers in the process, so it's an environmentally friendly ingredient.

The most commonly used snail for health and beauty is the *Helix aspersa*. Its health benefits (when eaten) include low fat and high protein, minerals, vitamins, and essential amino acids. This variety of snail has been used for many years in Chinese Traditional Medicine and is often "prescribed" for stomach disturbances, poor nutrition and high cholesterol.

For use in skincare, only the snail's secretion is needed. This serum is rich in oligosaccharides, which is a super hydrator for your skin. Applied to the skin, it increases your natural glow and provides antioxidants that protect the skin cells against environmental damage.

The proteins in the snail serum are also important for keeping the skin younger and renewing the collagen, elastin and hyaluronic acid cell production. This will give the skin more elasticity, faster healing, and reduced wrinkles and fine lines. The serum works wonders for acne and wounds.

I must confess, I'm not fond of eating snails, even with all their health benefits. But in beauty products, I'm a pretty big fan of the little mollusk. I tried Lamu Anti-Age Caracol Crème, with fantastic results.

Lamu Caracol Crème has extra ingredients that take the snail secretion even farther, such as Argireline, Matrixyl 3000 and coQ10.

So let the snail help you...if not on your dinner table, try it on your skin.



6

Paracress (*Acmella oleracea*) The Botox Plant from Brazil

by Edna Soua

There's almost always a natural plant remedy that can take the place of chemical or artificial treatments. You can use cayenne pepper or cinnamon for blood pressure control; stevia leaf instead of artificial sweeteners, and now there's a substitute for Botox too!

The plant is called Paracress or *Acmella oleracea*. Native of Brazil, it grows precisely in the Brazilian state of Para' although related species

can be found in Asia and Africa. The leaves give a tingly sensation to the tongue and have a spicy, peppery taste.

In the Amazon region of Para' the *Acmella* leaves are used as a vegetable, much like Kale or spinach. They are used in many traditional dishes. The leaves is so popular in Para' that average daily consumption of the plant is about 16kg, and that doesn't include people who grow the plant in their own backyards – which is plenty of people in that part of Brazil.

The leaves of the *Acmella oleracea* are used to prevent scurvy, flu, anemia, digestive problems, fever, malaria, and throat infection. They are disinfectant and full of vitamin C. The plant is used for mouth and gum problems due to its analgesic chemical compound called spilanthol. Also found in this plant are chemical compounds such as volatile oils and flavonoids.

The *Acmella* extract, known as Spilanthes, is widely used in cosmetic formulations in Brazil and now is gaining popularity worldwide as an effective and powerful anti-aging ingredient and instant wrinkle reducer. Spilanthes relaxes the facial muscles, releasing the tension and fine lines located in the eyes and mouth...just like Botox (but much safer).

Paracress is one of the many products arriving on the scene as a Botulinic toxin (Botox) alternative. With the accumulative effects of toxic chemicals in our bodies, I don't think these chemical formulas

are a good choice... I much prefer plants. Look for Paracress in Green Energy Serum by OrganoDerm and use it as a daily facial skin-boost. You'll love it!



7

Salicylic Acid The Miracle Cure for Headaches, Acne, and Much More

Everybody knows what aspirin is and that it's a cure for headaches and thins the blood, which can help reduce the risk of heart problems. But I want to talk about the main ingredient in those magic pills...or at least, the natural ingredient from which aspirin is derived.

There no exotic cure more popular and multifunctional than salicylic acid. Salicylic acid is the main chemical component naturally found in rue, marigold, wintergreen, ylang ylang, cassie, coca and willow Bark. But it's the willow bark that has salicin, which after ingestion results in

salicylic acid. Willow bark has been used by the ancients to heal pain and fever...just like it is today.

This healing acid is useful for everything from a simple headache, to acne, seborrheic dermatitis, psoriasis, hyperkeratosis and dandruff. Used topically, the acid has the keratolytic effect with the ability to remove skin cells from the most top layer of the skin.

No surprise that this powerful botanical ingredient is often used in shampoo, soaps, gels, pedicure products, anti-wart treatments, astringent lotions and also makeup foundations. Its effectiveness is so amazing that after using a product containing Salicylic acid, the results show up in only a few minutes, depending on the concentration of the acid.

In Japan many adolescents have acne prone skin, so a new foundation makeup that is making a big hit over there is one with Salicylic acid in its formula. Cosmetic formulators are now investing in products for men, especially aftershave products, containing Salicylic acid, since aftershave products are the most popular skincare products for men.

Besides cleansing the top skin layer, Salicylic acid also has hydrating properties and is useful to help other active ingredients penetrate the skin more completely, thus improving their results. If that's not enough, Salicylic acid also has conditioning, anti bacterial, anti fungal and anti-pruritic properties.

So the next time you think botanical ingredients are not as powerful as synthetic ones...remember the White Willow tree and its amazing bark that cures so many things...headaches being just one of them.



8

Rare Exotic Beauty

The best thing we have in life is choice. And choice is not lacking when we talk about exotic ingredients from all over the planet. Today, we can choose among great cosmetic and skincare products containing natural and organic ingredients from around the world...more effective than any traditional products from a big company, mass production, and full of harsh chemicals. The choice is ours.

Why do we need artificial ingredients if we have Mother Nature and so many smart chemist formulators to provide us with the best and healthiest active ingredients in their products? Why do the big

companies continue to use petroleum based chemicals? Simple...they make more money doing it that way.

When I attended chemistry school, I was in love with Nature and her resources. I thought if these active ingredients work so well for medicinal purposes, they can probably be used in beauty products too. I was right, of course. Today, exotic ingredients are moving into the world of health and skincare, so I've put together a list of some exciting ones, so you can get started with some of Mother Nature's benefits:

Sea Buckthorn is the little orange berry from Europe and Asia that's rich in essential fatty acids, Vitamins C and E, flavonoids and amino acids. With its amazing antioxidants and anti-aging properties, it has been largely used in skin and hair care. Look for it in products by Sibü.



The great golden oil from Morocco, called Argan oil, is preferred by beauty pros. As good for hair care such as for skin care, it doesn't clog the skin and it fights eczema and acne bacteria. Look for it in products by Moroccan Oil.



From the Amazon Rain forest I could list hundreds, but here are some of the best so far. Look for these ingredients in products by Rare Natural Care.

Copaiba Balsam is considered the Tea Tree oil of the Amazon. It acts in the skin, decreasing oily residue, regenerating skin tissue, and adding its anti-bacterial properties. It's also used as a natural fragrance fixative.



Cupuacu is the cousin of chocolate, and has a distinctive smell. The butter is extensively used in beauty products as a natural emollient, rich in phytosterol that is responsible for superior emolliency and skin protection. It's high in antioxidants too.



Murumuru is rich in fatty acids that protects the skin from dryness and provides elasticity to the tissue. It's a nut from a type of palm tree, growing in the Brazilian Amazon. Most commonly, it is commercialized in butter form, which is high in fatty acids and extensively used in cosmetics for dry damaged skin, and for ethnic hair care. Murumuru is rich in lipids that moisturize and hydrate the skin and hair.



So those are some of the best rare and exotic choices we have out there; just pick one up and say thanks to Mother Nature.

9



Argan Oil Exotic Ingredient from Morocco

These days, the health and beauty industries are constantly looking for exotic ingredients from remote regions of the world...a super berry from Brazil, healing mushrooms from China, and now...a rare oil from Northern Africa. Argan Oil is the latest thing in skin and hair care products. It's extracted from the seed of the *Argania spinosa* tree that grows in southern Morocco. Argan oil is to the Berber culture, what olive oil is to the Greeks...and it has been around just as long too.

Traditionally, the process of extracting the oil from the Argan nuts is a slow, manual process, usually entrusted to the Moroccan women. This

age-old method makes the oil unique and expensive outside Morocco. The production and extraction of Argan are completely regulated by the Cooperative of Berber Women and the area in which the Argan trees grow is protected by Unesco. This gives Argan a special charm and makes it genuinely environmentally safe and 100% organic.

Argan Oil is chemically composed of fatty acids (linoleic and oleic), palmitic acid, myristic acid, carotenoids and tocopherols. It has twice the fatty acids and other nutrients as Olive oil. The acids in Argan oil are responsible for its medicinal properties in hair care and skin care, providing nutrients, antioxidants and moisturizers. In Morocco, it has been used for centuries to combat skin diseases.

In culinary uses, Argan oil has its value for health; it helps protect the liver and lower cholesterol. It's also said to regulate blood pressure and protect against heart disease.

The cosmetic industry has long since discovered the advantages of this oil, as it has been used for years in Europe in both anti-aging products and hair care. But now you can find it almost anywhere in the world. That's the nature of exotic ingredients...they end up being discovered and enjoyed by everyone.



10

Indian Gooseberry The Anti-Aging Berry

by Edna Soua

Indian women so often have such beautiful skin. Have you ever wondered why? Well, there are many secrets that come from India and the special fruit call Indian Gooseberry is one of them. Indian Gooseberry (*Phyllanthus emblica*) is a a berry-like, greenish-grey bark and greenish-yellow flowers that grow in India, but different kinds of plants in the same family *Euphorbiaceae* are found in many subtropical and tropical countries, including China, Malay Peninsula

and Indonesia. The fruits are green, tender, fleshy and have a very sour taste, making them inedible by themselves.

The Indian Gooseberry has anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and hepatoprotective properties, plus it's a diuretic, laxative, trichogeneous (hair treatment) and antipyretic.

In the Hindu culture, the Indian gooseberry is known as *Amla*, and is used for memory and as an immune system booster for people in general, but particularly for the elderly. In Sanskrit it's called *amalaki* or *dhartriphala*, meaning the nectar fruit. It's a key ingredient in Ayurvedic medicine and is used for preventing common colds, diabetes, heart diseases, gastrointestinal problems, cancer, scurvy, eye disorder and signs of aging.

The chemical compounds found in Indian Gooseberry are ascorbic acids, alkaloids, polyphenols such as tannins, amlaic acid, Kamphor, quercetin, rutine, B-Sitosterol, ellagic acid and gallic acid.

Indian Gooseberry is well known in India for being a great natural source of Vitamin C, which is responsible for the synthesis of collagen in the body and is a powerful antioxidant. Because of that, the cosmetic and beauty industries are adopting the Indian Gooseberry in their formulations, especially for anti-aging products. The Indian Gooseberry is available in powder or in juice in most Hindu markets. Now you know the secret.

11



Reishi & Shiitake **The Best Medicine for Fall and Winter**

This Fall season, we're all probably going to be thinking about staying warm and healthy. If you think about soup on those cold days, good choice. But I suggest adding some medicinal food to yours. Don't worry I'm only talking about mushrooms, specifically Reishi and Shiitake.

These mushrooms are best known in Asia for boosting the immune system, curing headaches, cold and flu, and increasing vitality and intelligence. The Reishi mushroom (*Ganoderma lucidum*) is known in Chinese Medicine as *ling zhi*, which means "herb of spiritual potency." But in Greek, it's Ganos (meaning brightness), dermos (meaning skin), and lucidum (a Latin word meaning shining). You get the idea, right?

The Reishi, Powerful Compounds for Health

The Reishi mushroom is used to treat the heart, liver and lungs. Also it's prescribed for insomnia, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, blood sugar imbalance, palpitations and forgetfulness. Many use it for coughs and wheezing from dampness affecting the lungs. Also the Reishi mushroom has potent anti-aging, anti-tumor, anti-virus, and anti-bacterial properties. Put that in your soup!

But culinarily speaking, the Reishi mushroom has a bitter and woody flavor, not being the most popular mushroom in the kitchen. It's also available dried in Asian markets. Those Ganoderma species can also be found in different colors and forms in America, Africa, Europe and Asia. The species grows as a parasite on wide variety of trees, especially maples. The Reishi contains triterpenes, polysaccharides, peptidopolysaccharides, palmitic acid, fumaric acid, ricinoleic acid, glucosamine, resins, alkaloids, amino acids, coumarin, mannitol and purines. All amazing stuff.

The Shiitake: Healthy and Delicious

The Shiitake mushroom (*Lentinus edodes*) is very well known for being affective against several diseases, including cancerous cells, hepatitis B, HIV, influenza and other diseases caused by viruses. The shiitake compound called *lentinan* was known world wide for boosting the immune system and offering numerous other affects, like improving circulation, reducing cholesterol and promoting longevity.

The Shiitake mushroom is the most popular Japanese mushroom, with its smoky aroma and meaty texture. It's as enjoyable as a natural medicine as it is as a food. The Shiitake is also called the Black Forest mushroom, Japanese mushroom, Oakwood mushroom or Golden Oak mushroom. The name Shiitake is derived from the Japanese *Shii* meaning the tree where its is found, and *Take* meaning mushroom. The Shiitake mushroom is a great source of protein, iron and vitamin C.

Start Cooking!

With these kinds of mushrooms that can improve health, fight infections, improve energy, and keep you young and healthy, you are ready for the fall and winter months...and plenty of good meals! Here's something else: In researching this article, I also found an amazing spice mixture that includes both Shiitake and Reishi mushroom, among other healthy (and tasty) ingredients. It's called SuperFood Seasoning and you can find it at PotofGoldProducts.com What a great way to add more medicinal mushrooms to your cooking.



12

Uva Ursi

The Bear Berry for Bare Skin

Spring is here and it's time to start showing our bare arms and legs again. And this is when that dark spot on my leg appears again...and never gives me a break! Ok, so I've decided to get rid of it once and for all through a natural treatment and I found just what I needed, a plant extract called uva ursi. Here's a small distillation of what I've learned about this plant.

Uva ursi (scientific name, *Arctostaphylos uva ursi*) is named after the Latin words *uva* (meaning grape) and *ursi* (meaning bear), receiving this name because bears love to eat the uva ursi fruit. Its called

bearberry in english...go figure! Uva ursi has been used as popular medicine for diverse diseases for centuries. It grows in Northern Europe, and in the mountains of both North and South America.

The uva ursi plant was used by the American natives for centuries. Mixed with tobacco and other herbs, it was referred to as *kinnickinnick*, from the Algonquin for "mixture." The uva ursi leaves contain ellagic acid, mallic acid, gallic acid, arbutin, methyl-arbutin, ursone, myricetin, resins, volatile oil, allantoin and tannins.

The Amazing Health Properties of Arbutin

The chemical property responsible for so many cures is arbutin, which is a glycoside derived from hydroquinone. Arbutin is found in wheat and pear skin, but is especially present in uva ursi. This chemical is absorbed by the body and excreted via the kidneys. Throughout this process, arbutin's antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties work in the urinary and mucous membranes, washing the bacterias out of the body. But be careful with products containing arbutin isolated from its natural constituents, as it can be quite powerful and advice from a health care professional is advised.

Arbutin's action is so efficient that it is used for muscle pain and relaxing and soothing inflammation, such as sprains and bruises. Its tannins are used for endometrium-related problems and in preventing postpartum infections. It's also recommended for herpes, pyelitis, urethritis, uric acids, bladder stones and vaginal infections. But uva ursi is not just for women by any means. The allantoin in uva ursi is

widely used in aftershave creams. Its properties reduce secretions and improve tissue firmness, helping grow new and healthy cells.

Shorts and Skirts...Bring 'em On

The hydroquinone-derived arbutin from uva ursi is used in the cosmetics industry to naturally lighten the skin. Scientific studies show that arbutin used topically inhibits the progression of skin darkening and reduces melanin formation, blocking the tyrosinase activity in the skin. That means it's effective for reducing dark spots. (During the treatment of lightning skin spots, it's always recommended to avoid sunlight.)

Now I'll just follow a treatment with uva ursi and wait for Summer.



13

Sow Thistle The Herbal Cure From Your Back Yard

Two weeks ago, I was hiking not too far from my town and I found a very interesting plant, called Sow Thistle (technical name, *Sonchus oleraceus*). This plant is part of the Milk Thistle family and looks a lot like a dandelion plant. These plants belong to the Compositae family and include lettuce, daisies, sunflowers, absinthum, chrysanthemum and many others.

The Sow Thistle has a different name in Portuguese. In my native Brazil, it's called *serralha*, or *cerraja* in Spanish. In French it's *laiteron maraicher*, in Italian it's *crepigno-cicerbita*, in Chinese it's *da' ji*, and in German it's *kohl-gansedistel*. This plant is used in Brazil as a natural *vitiligo* cure.

It's very simple to identify this plant. Just go into your back yard and look for plants that grow everywhere without permission. When it flowers, Sow Thistle has a puff-ball stalk, like dandelions, that spread all over your garden. Now you can look at this plant differently; instead of being angry at it, you can think of it as your next natural remedy.

The Sow Thistle has carbohydrates, proteins and fiber. It's rich in minerals and vitamins too and its leaves contain calcium, phosphorus, iron, vitamin A, thiamine, riboflavin, niacin and vitamins C and E. In addition, it contains glycosides, essential oil, resins, tannins and steroids.

The Sow thistle acts as an anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, diuretic, blood cleanser, liver stimulant, and nervous system stimulant. It comes from temperate regions, and it's found in everywhere around the world with that climate. Just take a look in your own back yard.

14



Loofah

Health and Beauty Benefits

One thing you'll find in every Brazilian's home, whether they are inside or outside of Brazil, is (no, not cake) what's known as a *bucha*, or loofah in English (scientific name *Luffa Cylindrica*). In my grandmother's house there was a mature loofah plant that supplied our home and those of our friends and neighbors too. I remember when I was a kid, my uncles and aunts were always giving us cucumber (known as *pepino* in Portuguese) from my grandmother's garden and I remember asking why they always had those loofahs in their hands. It's funny how back then, people from the countryside were helping the environment by using those biodegradable loofahs to wash their dishes instead of using synthetic sponges.

Today in Brazil, there is an environmental project called (roughly translated) “The Brazilian Loofah Project,” which is to get more people using this plant.

Loofah comes from the *Curcubitaceae* family, which includes cucumber, chayote, watermelon, strawberry, squash and other melons. Loofah is somewhat cylindrical, green, and can reach over a meter in length. It grows as a vine and has beautiful yellow flowers. It’s rich in fibers that are soft, flexible and strong.

There are many types of loofah and they come from Asia, Africa, and the Americas and can now be found all over the world. It’s used in popular medicine; its roots and leaves are said to be good for the liver and regulate iron in the blood, thus helping with anemia and menstruation. The seeds are used in homeopathy to help with regularity.

Loofah is also used as a base for skin exfoliation in natural beauty products. It’s wonderful for baths and even crafts. I found a wonderful, large loofah with seeds inside at a Hispanic market here in the United States. I’m hoping the seeds will grow!



15

Arruda

Plant for Your Protection, the Benefits of Rue

For ages, Arruda, also known as Rue and Herb of Grace (scientific name *Ruta graveolens*) has been used to purify environments, repel parasites, and clear the mind of negative thoughts and energies.

Arruda as it's known in my homeland of Brazil, is originally from the Mediterranean region and grows well in dry environments. It thrives in direct sunlight. In my country, it's commonly used as an anti-parasitic and many people place a sprig of it in the closet or dresser drawer to keep the bugs away.

The Romans and Greeks commonly used Rue to remove negative energies and to treat a variety of health issues. You know the classic image of a Greek male with a sprig of leaves in his hair? Well, that was probably Rue in his hair...there to keep the lice away. Even Shakespeare referred to Rue as the “sacred herb of sundays” (Hamlet). It was commonly dipped in water and shaken at the faithful to clear them of negative spirits. Some cultures use Rue in cooking, as it’s rich in vitamin C. Its leaves and seeds are used in salads and sauces while its leaves are also dried and used in tea. In Europe, it was often infused into wine and stronger alcoholic drinks, such as Grappa, to aid in digestion.

Rue is from the Rutaceae family, rich in salicylic acid, alkaloids, flavonoids, rutin, quercetin, fenols, and many other substances useful in pharmaceuticals. A plant with similar properties in my homeland of Brazil, known as Jamborandi, is used widely in the pharmaceutical business, including medicines to fight glaucoma.

Besides all this, it can also be used to counter Belladonna poisoning and for bad breath.

In natural health circles, Rue is used to support the kidneys, bladder, intestines and inner ear. It can also be used for infections of the eyes, constipation, sciatica, asthma, headaches, dermatitis, and strokes. However, it must be used in moderation, as too much Rue can be toxic; pregnant women or those desiring to get pregnant should stay away from Rue, as it has abortive properties.

You can grow Rue yourself in the backyard. It's a hardy plant that requires direct sunlight. It can be found under the names Arruda, Common Rue, Herb of Grace, Ruta, Golden Rue, Herbygrass, Somalata, Weinraute, Sadab and German Rue. If you're not up for growing your own, you can also find it in herbal mixtures of all kinds.

16



Cupuaçu **The Next Craze from Brazil**

Cupuaçu (pronounced koo-poo-ah-**soo**) is a fruit that grows in the Amazon region from a tree that often exceeds 50 feet and is related to the cacao tree (from which chocolate is derived). Like the cacao, the seeds of the cupuaçu are often ground into a fine powder and used in drinks and baked goods. The fruit produces an oil that is used in both the natural health and cosmetics industries. The fruit has even been used as a substitute for cacao in the production of chocolate. Like cacao, the cupuaçu tree is quite sensitive and prone to disease.

The smell of the cupuaçu fruit is strong...so strong that many consider it to be overbearing, but the taste is unlike anything else. It has a

tangy, berry-like flavor, but with a hint of chocolate. It is my brother-in-law's favorite flavor of ice cream and it can now be found in superfood and antioxidant products in the United States and Europe.

The cupuaçu fruit can be found all over Brazil, but is mostly encountered in the northern regions. It's not as sweet as some other tropical fruits, but is nevertheless used in baked goods, juices, ice cream and even alcoholic beverages. It's high in fat and vitamins B1, B2, and C. Plus, it has protein, calcium, and iron. It is used as a natural energy enhancement due to its caffeine content (which is less than chocolate).

The aboriginal people of the Amazon Region have used cupuaçu for centuries to treat abdominal pain and it's used today in cosmetics in skin creams, hydrating lotions, lipstick, bath oils, soap, and natural sun screen lotions. It is already being produced and commercialized in Japan for use in cosmetics and could well become the next craze for juices and healthfood drinks. I'm waiting for the cupuaçu ice cream to arrive!

17

Copaiba The Healing Tree

Copaiba (scientific name, *Copaifera officinalis*), aside from being a beautiful and noble hardwood, also gives us an oil that has a surprising number of medicinal properties. Copaiba (pronounced koh-pah-ee-bah) is from the Amazon region and is encountered in Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia and Columbia.

The resin that is extracted from the Copaiba tree is a brown or golden oil that has a strong smell of wood. It has a sticky, resinous texture similar to propolis or tea tree oil. The aboriginal cultures of the Amazon have used it for centuries to heal wounds and to cure various illnesses, including gonorrhea.

The oil is largely used in medicine in Brazil to combat arthritis, gas and indigestion, ulcers, skin cancer, skin fungus, colds, coughs, and infections. It has anti-tumor, anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory, and anti-fungal properties and is a diuretic, mild laxative and analgesic. The oil is also used in wood varnishes, cosmetics (as a fixing agent for perfumes), and in fuel for lanterns (which seems like a waste of a great healing substance). All that from a little tree sap!

Copaiba's anti-inflammatory and wound healing properties are due to powerful chemical components, such as bisabolene, carioazulene and cariophillene, among many others. The resin or oil can be found in both natural and traditional pharmacies throughout Brazil and it comes in pure oil form or in gel caps.

I always bring a reserve of several bottles with me when I visit my family in Brazil...but you can also find it online without too much effort.

18

Jaborandi Don't Sweat It



When you talk about healthy hair and stimulated hair growth in Brazil, you are probably talking about a plant called Jaborandi (pronounced djah-bohr-ahn-djee), or in scientific terms *Pilocarpus jaborandi* Holmes. This plant is native to the Amazon region and has been used by the people of Brazil since colonial times, and before that by the native Tupis people. The word jaborandi comes from the Tupi language and means, “plant that makes the mouth water.”

Jaborandi does, in fact, help to produce saliva and perspiration, being a sudorific herb. It's also an anti-inflammatory, digestive aid and diuretic and it helps increase blood pressure and circulation. Due to

diverse side effects, it's not recommended to use this herb in its natural state without some knowledge of its use. Indigenous groups, believed that its ability to cause excessive sweating was useful in curing disease and even prevent poisons from harming the body.

The chemical component that is responsible for all these benefits is called Pilocarpina, an alkaloid that is currently being tested throughout the medical and pharmaceutical industries as a treatment for glaucoma, since it appears to reduce pressure within the eyes. Pilocarpina tablets are prescribed in Brazil for patients undergoing radiotherapy, as it stimulates the saliva glands.

For all its medical uses, the plant is most widely used in Brazil because of its astringent qualities that help to clean the pores and hair follicles. Its stimulating effects on the scalp make it the number one remedy for hair loss, oily hair and dandruff.

In the interior of Brazil, where I grew up, it's easy to find a sprig of jaborandi if you know someone with some plant knowledge (there are many). The extract is reddish-brown and smells fresh and clean. I often made my own extracts from the leaves and used them in shampoo — especially for my husband's oily hair.

19



Caju **The Forgotten Fruit**

I'll never forget visiting the Northeast Region of Brazil and walking under the shade of Brazil's largest Caju tree, which is actually more like a grove, since it consists of many entangled trees, all sprouting from the same root structure. The fruit dangles from the branches like golden Christmas ornaments.

Caju is a fruit that is easily encountered in the Northeast Region of Brazil. It ripens to a glowing reddish-yellow with a hook-shaped seed at the bottom. That seed, not the fruit itself, is what most people know about this plant, whose scientific name is *Anacardium occidentale*. This seed is highly valued and well known throughout the world — after a bit of roasting and salting — as the cashew nut. So forgotten is

the fruit of this plant that growers in Brazil consider the seed to be the true fruit.

But the Caju fruit itself provides much more, in terms of health benefits, than its tasty seed. It has antiseptic, anti-inflammatory, antiviral and febrifuge (fever reducing) qualities. Plus, it provides natural energy and is said to stimulate the libido. It also has anti-parasitic properties and is useful for combating intestinal problems and gastric ulcers. Its antifungal and antiviral qualities are useful for healing warts.

In Brazil, it's used to cure diarrhea and anemia, treat asthma and bronchitis, and fix urinary problems. It is used in the treatment of muscular fatigue, diabetes, skin lesions, eczema and psoriasis. It's high vitamin C levels make it a widely used cure for colds and flu.

Caju's chemical components include cardol, anacardol acids, limonene, folacin, myristic acid, phytosterols, quercetin-glycoside, stearic acid, squalene, salicylic acid, leucine, and others. The fruit is rich in iron, calcium, B-complex vitamins and C vitamins.

Caju juice has been used for centuries by the natives of Brazil's Northeast Region. The name Caju comes from the Tupi-Guarani language, and means "year." This is because the Tupi-Guarani people collected one seed each season to count the number of years that have passed and to keep track of their ages.

In the trunk of the Caju tree is a resin known as "Arabian gum," which is used as an insect repellent by the people of the region. And

the sap of this remarkable tree is used as a dye and, by some, as a natural birth control supplement.

Today Caju juice is available in just about any supermarket in Brazil for less than one dollar — either in concentrate or frozen pulp. It's one of the most common and least expensive juices in the country. And it's hardly known abroad.

If you travel to the Northeast of Brazil, you'll surely encounter some of the many products made with the Caju fruit — products like liqueur, jelly, Caju brandy, honey, and even Caju syrup.

Caju season is from November to January, so make plans to spend your next Christmas vacation under one of Brazil's shady Caju trees.

20

Catuaba Stimulate Your Immune System...and a Whole Lot More

When we speak of aphrodisiacs or natural sex enhancement in Brazil, the word that comes to everyone's lips is Catuaba. Catuaba (scientific name, *Trichilia catigua*) is known all over the world as the Brazilian Viagra without the harmful side effects. In Brazil, Catuaba has such a following that we have a saying about it: "œp to sixty years old, a father's children are his own; after sixty, they come from the Catuaba.

The aboriginal groups of the Amazon have been using Catuaba for centuries as an aphrodisiac, but it's also used in the treatment of fatigue, insomnia, hypochondria, impotence, erectile dysfunction and

sciatica. It also helps with concentration and provides natural energy and immune support.

Its medical properties extend even farther, as an analgesic, anti-inflammatory and antiviral. It helps dilate and strengthen the arteries and improves circulation. Its chemical composition includes tannins, phyto-chemicals, and flavonoids for super antioxidant prowess. More recently, studies show that Catuaba extract strengthens blood cells and helps them fight off all kinds of pathogens, including the HIV virus.

Brazilian herbalists believe that the composition or color of a fruit or herb, or the color of its extract, indicates the organ upon which it operates — the organ to be cured or remedied. The extract of Catuaba bark is red, which links it to the blood, liver and circulatory system. Just drop a small piece into a cup of hot water and watch it turn as red as the fires of passion.

Catuaba is a tree that grows in the Northern Amazon and in some northern states in Brazil. It has yellow and orange flowers and bears an oval-shaped, yellowish-brown fruit. It belongs to the Erythroxilaceae family and its bark is where the powerful alkaloid Erythoxilum is concentrated, with its uncommon antiviral and antibacterial qualities.

In Brazil, you can find Catuaba infused with wine and sold in supermarkets. It's very popular among young Brazilian couples. You can also find it in capsules, either alone or in combination with other

herbs, and sold either as a sexual stimulant or just as a general energy formula.

Does it really work as an aphrodisiac? Well, one time my husband was traveling in the Pantanal region of Brazil and found a traditional aphrodisiac formula of the local Tupis people, which contained Catuaba, among other ingredients. All I can tell you is, those Tupis sure know their plants



21

Ora Pro Nobis

Give us this day our daily...hedge clippings

In the month of May, there is an interesting festival in the interior of Brazil in the state of Minas Gerais, called The Festival of Ora Pro Nobis. The name is Latin meaning “pray for us,” but this is not a religious festival by any means. On the contrary, it’s a festival of food, specifically in regional dishes made with the leaves of the Ora Pro Nobis plant — not to mention all the beer and caipirinhas one can drink. Ora Pro Nobis — pray for us.

Now I, as a good mineira (girl from Minas Gerais), already know all about Ora Pro Nobis from my childhood at my grandmother's country house. This plant, which grows abundantly in the area, is known as the "meat of the poor." It's said in Brazil that a family with an Ora Pro Nobis plant in its backyard will never be malnourished. Outside my home state, dishes made with Ora Pro Nobis can be found only in the fanciest of restaurants in Brazil's biggest cities. Now there's irony for you. Ora Pro Nobis.

The origin of the name comes from the plant's historical use by the Churches to make tall hedges around the church grounds. Picking the leaves was forbidden by the priests, of course, but with the temptation so clearly visible, the people found a way to obtain the succulent leaves while the priest was not looking — during his daily Ora Pro Nobis (pray for us) prayer.

The plant has small leaves that are dark green and meaty. It's customarily prepared in saucy dishes with pork, chicken, duck, codfish, ground beef, or in omelets. It's a cactus from a particularly ancient genus, of the Pereskias family, which have small leaves and interwoven stick-like branches, similar to a Bougainville. It has long, but soft and supple thorns and pretty yellow flowers that are also edible and smell of citrus.

Ora Pro Nobis has high concentrations of calcium, magnesium, iron, lysine and vitamins A, B1, B2, B3 and C. It's also high in fiber, protein

and carbohydrates — higher even than spinach. It has one of the highest concentrations of protein of any plant on the planet.

These healthy little leaves also have medicinal properties and are used to treat skin infections and tumors. The fruit of the Ora Pro Nobis is used as an expectorant and antiviral treatment. Together, they combat stomach problems, aid digestion, cure anemia, and help stimulate healthy intestinal flora. Ora Pro Nobis.

I've discovered that I can encounter this familiar plant right here in the northern lands, since it grows in the more humid and tropical states, like Texas and Florida. Here it's known as Spanish Goosberry, Barbados Goosberry, Bladde Apple, Lemonvine and Sweet Mary. And you know...those who seek shall find. Maybe I'll even come across an Ora Pro Nobis festival around here someday.

22



Acai

The Amazon's Original Energy Drink

Ahh, a bowl of chilled Acai; that's what's becoming a hit on the beaches around the world, from Hawaii to Barcelona. But there was a time when this special treat was available only in Brazil. Now it's everywhere. In the United States, Acai juice is hitting the big time. But Acai is served much differently in my home country.

This little purple fruit has a thick, pasty consistency, being rich in pectin. It has long been a favorite snack in the Amazon region but quickly spread across Brazil — first in natural health circles, then reaching the beaches as a popular frozen snack, like ice cream or shaved ice. Most recently, it has become popular in health spas and gyms throughout Brazil where it is topped with bananas and granola. Quite often, you can get it with guarana syrup added, for an extra

energy kick. Back in the Amazon, the aboriginal people eat Acai with course ground manioc flower, also called tapioca.

Acai (pronounced “ah-sah-ee”) is the fruit of a palm tree that grows in the Amazon region. The fruit itself is small and most often purple (a white variety is less common). Its name derives from an indigenous word that means “fruit that cries.”

The small, fast-growing species of palm that bears the Acai fruit also produces the highest quality “heart of palm.” Its seeds are used in the Amazon region as natural fertilizer and shipped across Brazil for use in arts and crafts. And if you ever visit the Amazon region and see the traditional homes, you’ll see how the palm’s leaves are used: to make thatched roofs. They are also used in the fabrication of cellulose for paper. As you can see, pretty much everything from this little palm tree is put to good use. And the roots are left so the tree may grow again the next season.

This incredible plant has commercial uses in the health food, pharmaceutical, paper, and cosmetics industries. As for the fruit itself, it’s super-rich in energy and has abundant fiber, potassium, calcium, magnesium, sodium, iron, copper, zinc and vitamins B1 and E.

The market for Acai is huge in the Amazon region, because of its singular flavor and excellent nutritional value — not to mention its special gift of high energy. In the city of Belem, in the Eastern Amazon, there are more than 2500 Acai stands that support the

consumption of nearly 100,000 liters of the frozen treat per day. Studies show that in Rio de Janeiro, close to 500 tons of Acai are sold each month.

But you can find a bowl of tasty Acai in just about any beach bar or bungalow on the Brazilian coast. And it's soon to be appearing on beaches all over the world.



23

Carqueja

Cleaning the Body and the Back Yard

Whenever I hear the name carqueja, I remember my childhood in the interior of Brazil and going outside with my grandmother to search for the special plants that would be dried and bound together at the end of long sticks to make brooms. That's how carqueja is known in the countryside of Brazil. And it's used by the people of the region for sweeping their dirt paths and backyard areas.

In the same back woods culture, carqueja is also used by the men. They put it inside their booze to create an infusion that helps protect the liver from the harmful effects of...well...the booze itself, including

the unwanted acquisition of intestinal parasites. So it's just as common in the bars of these old, back-home towns as it is in the homes. And it comes accompanied by a long story.

Carqueja originates in the Peruvian Andes. It's part of a group of plants native to the region that includes Paraguay, Southern Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Bolivia. In the hillsides of Argentina, it's believed that carqueja is an aphrodisiac and it's used to combat female infertility. In some old Brazilian traditions, women take baths in carqueja to help increase their chances of getting pregnant.

Carqueja is a succulent with long, three-sided stalks from which sprout thin white hairs. Along the edges of this three-bladed sword bloom small white flowers in cute little clusters. It's a bitter herb and that's why it's also known as "bitter carqueja."□ But in this bitterness lies a nectar that helps cure many health problems.

Carqueja is recommended for fever, gastro-intestinal problems, gingivitis, gout, female infertility, male erectile dysfunction, gastritis, obesity, intestinal problems, diarrhea and rheumatism. It also helps reduce cholesterol and strengthens the intestines. It's a diuretic, so it helps with kidney and bladder problems, and, let's not forget, helps rid the body of parasites.

This interesting plant is used to cure hypoglycemia and anemia. It has antibiotic, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and anti-parasitic properties and is a febrifuge (fever reducer). As you can see, it's a versatile little

plant and a natural remedy for many ills. And it is widely used in natural beauty products throughout South America, including children's shampoo (where it helps fight lice) and shampoo for oily hair. Carqueja is most often harvested in the summer, since in Brazil, we tend to start our fitness regimens rather late and this plant is used in many weight loss programs. It is used by many to help them show off in those scant summer fashions.

So whether or not we swept up the back yard with it, we were never without carqueja at my house.

24



Boldo do Chile A Cure for the Common Hangover...and More

Boldo do Chile is one of the most well known herbs in Brazil, although due to its horribly bitter taste, it's not necessarily one of the most popular. In the southern half of Brazil, you can find a boldo bush growing in the back yard of just about any rural or suburban home. It's a hearty plant that is easy to grow and cultivate. And as much as Brazilians love to party — it's good to have this natural hangover remedy close at hand.

As its name suggests, boldo is native to Chile. Shepherds in the Andes mountains noticed that their goats were not suffering from liver or intestinal problems since they had been dieting on boldo leaves. So they decided to check into it and discovered that the plant has numerous medicinal properties. Later, researchers from the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Turkey and European countries came to the same conclusions about the plant. It has been found to have antiseptic, diuretic, anesthetic, antifungal, antibacterial, and antiviral qualities. It also aids digestion and stomach disorders, regulates uric acid, eliminates intestinal gas, reduces blood sugar levels and ensures a healthy menstruation (it has abortive qualities and should not be used during pregnancy).

Well known as the hangover herb, it is used by many in South America after a long night out (can you say Carnival?). It acts directly on the liver and stomach, alleviating the most distasteful symptoms of alcohol. Taken daily, it substantially improves the complexion and removes any "tired" aspect in the face.

The best way to take boldo is to crush a few freshly-picked leaves in a few ounces of spring water with a pestle, then strain and drink. It's most bitter and most effective this way. But finding fresh boldo leaves may be challenging outside of South America. Look for herbal extracts and dried leaves or tea bags as an alternative. And if you ever visit Brazil for Carnival, be sure to have a few leaves on hand and use them before you go to sleep.



25

Urucum

More Than a Food Coloring

Urucum, or *Bixa orellana*, is known internationally as Annatto, but to me it's very much a Brazilian herb and I've known about it since I was a child. The Urucum tree grows to as high as six meters (20 feet) and produces a spiny, copper-colored fruit. Inside this fruit are red seeds that are used principally for their color.

The first Portuguese settlers in Brazil noticed that the native people used a red paint on their bodies that was made from Urucum, which comes from the Tupi word *uru'ku* meaning red. The natural coloring from Urucum has since been used throughout Brazil in all sorts of

country cooking and also as a general dye. But the seeds are also used as laxatives and digestive aids and also help with bronchitis and burns. In some regions, the roots and leaves are used in the treatment of gonorrhoea and herpes.

Today Urucum is exported to North America and Europe, where it's used as a coloring for a range of industrial applications, foods, and beauty products. The greatest producers of Urucum are Brazil, Peru and Kenya (the Spanish brought the plant to Africa from South America).

When I was a kid, Urucum was often used as an artificial tanning ointment. Some people would show up at the swimming pool or waterfall (I grew up in the interior of Brazil) with Urucum in carrot oil to help jump start their tans.

Urucum is rich in carotenoids, which give the seeds their characteristic reddish-orange color. The seeds also contain proteins, calcium, iron and vitamins B2, B2 and B3. Urucum is useful as an expectorant and is beneficial for hypertension, digestive problems, parasites, circulation, heart disease, high cholesterol, skin lesions, and constipation. Oh, and it makes a good food coloring too.

26



Devil's Claw

God's Gift for Back and Muscle Pain

Brazilians are using all sorts of plants and herbs to alleviate pains and strains. What's "in vogue" today is an herb called garra do diabo, or devil's claw (scientific name, *Harpagophytum procumbens*). But don't be startled by the name; it's not what you think. Devil's claw got a bad rap in the name department. As you will see, it's more like a gift from the gods in the treatment of arthritis, rheumatism, fibromialgia, bursitis, tendonitis, spinal problems, osteoporosis, and general muscular pain.

Its properties began to be studied around the time of WWII by European scientists, who dubbed it devil's claw due to its many thorny spines that resemble claws. It has analgesic, anti-inflammatory and

febrifuge (fever-reducing) properties. It also helps heal wounds, stimulates the digestive and lymphatic systems and helps in the production of bile from the liver and gall bladder. These qualities make it among the most sought after cures for lumbar and other back and muscle pain in South America.

In the United States, devil's claw is not well known or widely used. It originated in southern Africa and grows in the deserts of the Namibia region. The locals of that region use it for kidney, bladder and liver pain. It's also believed that the sooner one begins using this herb, the more one postpones the aches and pains of aging. The herb is immensely popular in some parts of the world and is even being used on horses in some Arabic countries. Even my own herbal "pharmacy" at home would never be without it; this devil's claw was more like an angel's touch in curing my husband's back pain.

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