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The Herb Acacia

By Judi Singleton

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Acacia

(ka'sh) , any plant of the large leguminous genus Acacia, often thorny shrubs and trees of the family Leguminosae (pulse family). Chiefly of the tropics and subtropics, they are cultivated for decorative and economic purposes. Acacias are characteristic of savanna vegetation and are especially numerous in the South African bushveld. The foliage often appears feathery because of the many small leaflets, but in some species leaflike flattened stems contain chlorophyll and take the place of leaves. Various Old World species (especially *A. arabica* and *A. senegal*) yield gum arabic; other species, chiefly *A. catechu*, yield the dye catechu. Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*) is valued in Australia for its hardwood timber. Other members of the genus are valuable for lac, for perfume and essential oils, and for tannins; some are used as ornamentals. The Australian acacias are commonly called wattles-their pliable branches were woven into the structure of the early wattle houses and fences and Wattle Day celebrates the national flower at blossoming time. Many wattles are cultivated elsewhere, particularly in California, as ornamentals for their characteristic spherical, dense flowers. The Central American bullhorn acacias (e.g., *A. sphaerocephala*) have large hollow thorns inhabited by ants that are said to feed upon a sweet secretion of the plant and in turn guard it against leaf-eating insects. The most common acacia indigenous to the United States is the cat's-claw (*A. gregii*) of the arid Southwest. The biblical shittim wood is thought to have come from an acacia. Various species of locust are sometimes called acacia, and acacias may be called mimosa; all are of the same family. Acacia is classified in the division Magnoliophyta, class Magnoliopsida, order Rosales, family Leguminosae.

Common names, Cape gum, Egyptian thorn, Gum Arabic tree, Gum acacia, Gum Arabic, India gum tree, Bablah pods, Acacia bambolah.

Acacia is a small, spiny, leguminous tree or shrub. After the rainy season ends, the stem begins to exude gum, which is collected from December to June for marketing as gum Arabic. The acacia has alternate, bipinnate leaves and axillary racemes of yellow flowers arranged in globose heads. The fruit is an oblong pod.

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Grows in sandy soil, mostly in tropical Africa

Acacia was a sacred wood for the ancient Hebrews. Moses used acacia wood in building the Ark of the Covenant and the sacred Tabernacle (see Exodus, chapters 25–40).

According to Near–Eastern Christian legend, a thorny species of acacia was used for Christ's crown of thorns.

Moapa Paiute name for acacia is "Pah oh pimb." Used for inflammation of the eyes, due to dust;

vaqueros and travelers habitually carry acacia seeds and put 4 in each eye on retiring.

Gum Arabic's main effect is to form a protective, soothing coating over inflammations in the respiratory, alimentary, and urinary tracts. It is helpful for coughs, sore throat, and catarrh, eyewash, diarrhea, and dysentery. Sweetened, it is sometimes used for typhoid fever.

Acacia greggii

Taxonomy: Magnoliophyta (angiosperm), Magnoliopsida (dicot), Fabaceae (formerly Leguminosae)

Common names: catclaw, Gregg cat claw, cat's claw acacia, tear blanket, devils claw, paradise flower, long–flowered catclaw, Texas mimosa, uña de gato.

Acacia greggii is a member of the Fabaceae family; it is native to the Southwestern United States and northern Mexico. Catclaw occurs primarily in semi–desert grasslands and brushy range lands largely confined to washes. It is often found on the upper slopes of a bajada (Spanish for downhill) where moisture is more available than middle or lower bajada situations. Catclaw has the highest water requirements of several species of desert shrubs tested, partially explaining why although it is found in arid regions, is often confined to dry washes or stream bottoms with relatively shallow water tables.

Catsclaw a perennial, is characterized as being a 3 to 10 foot tall shrub but may develop into an upright tree 25 to 30 feet tall. It is often thicket forming and has numerous spreading, slender thorny branches. The brown, stout, "claw like" thorns are about 0.25 inch long. The bark is gray to black. Numerous creamy–yellow flowers occur in 1.25 to 2.5 inch long spikes. The stiff and papery gray–brown legume–type fruits are 2 to 5.5 inches long, 0.5 to 0.75 inch wide, curved or contorted, flattened and constricted between the seeds.

Propagation:

Catsclaw acacia reproduces sexually by producing an abundance of seeds. Vegetative regeneration (sprouting) occurs following damage to the above–ground portion of the plant. Catclaw acacia flowers are pollinated by insects and begin to produce seed between 4 to six years of age. It has shown varying success when transplanted. Seedlings can be nursery grown in tall containers to accommodate the deep root systems. In California, seed collected in the field exhibited good germination without any special treatment in fall or spring.

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Catsclaw acacia has flowers in yellow, cylindrical spikes. The flowers and leaves of this plant resemble mesquite, but cats claw thorns are like rose thorns, broad at the base and curved backward while mesquite thorns are straight. The seed pods of the catsclaw split upon maturing mesquite pods do not. Photos provided by and copyrighted to: NatureSongs

Preparation:

Gather the pods when still green and dry the leaves and branches over a paper as the leaves often fall off while hanging. The longer distal roots, chopped into small segments while moist. The gum is gathered the same way as mesquite gum and the flowers are dried. The green leaves, stems, and pods are powdered for tea (standard infusion) or for topical application; the roots are best used as a cold standard infusion, warmed for drinking and gargling.

Medicinal Uses:

Pods are used for conjunctivitis in the same manner as mesquite pods and the gum, although catsclaw is harder to harvest it is used in the same way as mesquite gum. The powdered pods and leaves make an excellent infused tea (2–4 ounces of the standard infusion every three hours) for diarrhea and dysentery, as well as a strongly astringent hemostatic and antimicrobial wash. The straight powder will stop superficial bleeding and can also be dusted into moist, chafed body folds and dusted on infants for diaper rash. The flowers and leaves as a simple tea are good anti-inflammatory for the stomach and esophagus in nausea, vomiting, and hangovers. It is distinctly sedative. The root is thick and mucilaginous as a tea and is good for sore throat and mouth inflammations as well as dry raspy coughing.

People who have used this plant:

Catsclaw has been used by Native Americans for treating the sore backs and flanks of their horses. There has been no specific information on cultural practices concerning catsclaw. Most sources indicate that the plant has been used by many groups in the southwestern United States.

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Are You Stricken With Chronic Inflammatory Arthritis?

By Darrell Miller

Arthritis generally comes in two forms osteoarthritis and inflammatory–arthritis. For this article we will

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discuss inflammatory–arthritis and natural herbal alternatives for reducing swelling and pain. The popular option for controlling arthritis pain is taking prescribed non–steroidal anti–inflammatory drugs; these drugs have been linked to cardiovascular, kidney and liver disease. If that doesn't sound appealing, natural alternatives are available for inflammatory arthritis. Herbs like boswellia, ginger, skullcap, turmeric, acacia, hops, holy basil, feverfew, and white willow bark. Fortunately supplement manufacturers have learned about the anti–inflammatory properties of these herbs and do make them in various combinations to help relieve swelling and pain.

The first one on the list is boswellia, has a long history of use as a mild anti–inflammatory herb for joint pain and stiffness, and noted by herbalists of its effectiveness. The primary compound in boswellia known for its anti–inflammatory affect is boswellic acid, when purchasing boswellia always look for products standardized to boswellic acid. Ginger root has been known for its anti–inflammatory affects as well, ginger inhibits the production of the immune–system components called cytokines which cause inflammation in the body. Ginger is also known as a COX–1 and COX–2 inhibitor in suppressing prostaglandin synthesis which would reduce inflammation in the body. Ginger also stimulates circulation helping the body bring vital blood and nutrients to the inflamed areas of the body. Skullcap is used in traditional Chinese medicine as an anti–inflammatory herb. Turmeric also known as Curcumin has been used in Asia, India, china, central and south America as an anti–inflammatory herb for many years. The curcuminoids in turmeric has been clinically proven to reduce inflammation. Turmeric is also a potent antioxidant good for fighting free radical damage which tend to cause inflammation in the body. Acacia and hops are both traditionally used for inflammation and pain. Feverfew since the first century has been used for the treatment of headaches, fever, menstrual discomfort, arthritis, and other aches and pains. According to a clinical trial study in England, feverfew when taken for three to four months can reduce the severity and frequency of migraines and other sorts of pain. Feverfew acts in a manner like the class of pain relievers known as COX–2 inhibitors, feverfew also reduces the absorption of thymidine by white blood cells, this will reduce the rate at which leukotrienes is produced which is a inflammatory chemical in the body. Finally, white willow bark has been used like aspirin as a pain killer with out the aspirin side effects. White willow has been used for fever, colds, minor infections, acute and chronic rheumatic disorders, mild headaches, and pain caused by inflammation. According to a clinical study done on white willow bark in England, researchers at the center for Complementary Health Studies at the University of Exeter gave eighty two participants with chronic arthritic pain either Reumalex, herbal supplement with white willow, or placebo. After two months the white willow herb proved to be superior to the placebo pill.

This is by far a complete list of herbs good for reducing inflammation in the body but it is a good start to help you on your way to recovering from inflammatory arthritis. As always, the statements in this article are not intended to diagnose, treat and cure or prevent disease please consult your health care physician before discontinuing medication or introducing herbs into your diet if you are currently on medication of any kind.

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