

*NEEM – THE VILLAGE PHARMACY

By Mike King

Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were a beautiful tree that not only provided shade, but also was a source for helping with many ailments? Throughout the tropical regions there is such a tree, its called Neem. People take the twigs from the tree chew on them until the ends become bristles then brush with the natural "toothbrush" to clean their teeth after meals. The components of the sap and bark clean the teeth and keep the gums healthy. Children in Africa like to eat the fruit as after schools treats while playing in the branches of the Neem tree. Teas made from the leaves are a cure-all for almost any ailment. The kernels in the fruit make medicinal oil for all kinds of external skin ailments and can even be used as an insecticide and for birth control. Yet, Neem products are all natural and less toxic than common table salt!

Neem trees are commonly found throughout India in the rural areas. Neem or *Azadirachta indica* is a tropical evergreen related to mahogany. It is a native to east India and Burma, and grows in much of Southeast Asia and West Africa. Recently, a few trees have been planted in several Central American countries and the Caribbean. Being a tropical tree it cannot tolerate temperatures below freezing. Neem is a sturdy tree looking similar to our oak tree, growing up to 50 feet tall and living over 200 years. The blooms are small white flowers that smell like a very sweet jasmine. Neem trees can even bear up to 110 pounds of fruit annually.

Even though Neem is not as well-known as ginseng, echinacea, or even garlic it has proven to have a far wider array of uses than any other herb. For thousands of years Neem has been used in India to fortify general health and cure various ailments and is known in the rural areas as the "Village Pharmacy." Ancient Ayurvedic texts utilized timeless formulations with Neem. Ayurveda comes from the Sanskrit words ayus ("life") and veda ("science"). Literally ayurveda means the science of life. Humans throughout history have looked for a cure-all or true panacea for illness and disease. Of all the herbs, Neem ranks as one of the most important and comes the closest to a true botanical panacea. Recent studies and investigation of the healing properties of Neem have dramatically increased worldwide interest.

Amazingly, the whole tree is used - bark, seeds, leaves, fruit, gum and oil. The tree contains over one hundred terpenoid compounds plus over twenty-five active compounds that are responsible for its exceptional benefits to humans. These botanical compounds are antiviral, antibacterial, antitumor, antimicrobial, antipyretic (fever reducing), analgesic (pain relieving), anthelmintic (kills parasites), antifungal, anti-inflammatory, anti-anxiety, and immune stimulating. The Neem leaf is generally taken internally and the oil from the kernel in the berry like fruit is used externally. Neem is now found in bath powders, bar soaps, shampoos, toothpastes, mouthwashes, creams, face packs, and many medicinal formulas.

Interestingly, Neem oil is used as an insecticide and repellent but is environmentally friendly and non-toxic. The Neem tree produces a compound called azadirachtin, which protects it from damaging insects. The seeds of the Neem tree, which the oil is extracted, contain the highest concentration of azadirachtin. Basically, the oil has an extremely bitter flavor and garlic like odor that stops insects from feeding and suffocates soft-bodied insects on contact. Neem is extremely effective against pediculosis (head lice and scabies). Because of its high safety, Neem shampoo is widely used and has replaced lindane internationally. The US EPA now bans

lindane, a very dangerous neurotoxin, but unfortunately the US FDA continues to allow lindane-based shampoos for use as a pharmaceutical medicine for children.

Neem is currently being used for psoriasis, diabetes, AIDS, cancer, heart disease, herpes, periodontal diseases, dermatology, allergies, ulcers, birth control (both male and female), hepatitis, fungus, parasites, pet care, moles, warts, emotional disorders, and malaria, just to name a few. It has been proposed by science that the ancient Neem tree has genetically similar properties to humans in its makeup. This is why Neem has been able to fight our common diseases and illnesses without harming us. In John Conricks book, *Neem the ultimate herb*, he states, "Neem is a dynamic and useful plant that can solve dozens of health problems, while enhancing well-being." We will be seeing much more of Neem in our near future.

**This information is for educational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.*