

Amla Herb and Fruit Profile

Also known as

Emblica officianalis (formerly *Phyllanthus emblica*), amlaki, Indian gooseberry

Introduction

Amla, or Indian gooseberry, is the fruit of a small to medium-sized deciduous tree native to India. The berries—which are light greenish yellow, with a fibrous inner texture and a sour, bitter, astringent taste—ripen and are harvested by hand in the fall. In Hinduism, the amla tree is considered sacred to the goddess Lakshmi. A much-beloved staple of traditional Ayurvedic medicine, amla is considered a cooling pitta herb and is believed to benefit the emotional heart as well as the physical heart and body, bestowing long life, happiness and luck in love.

Constituents

Ascorbic acid, tannins, polyphenols, flavonoids, kaemferol, ellagic acid, gallic acid

Parts Used

In traditional Indian medicine the dried or fresh fruit is used, although in some schools of Ayurvedic medicine parts of the entire tree are included in preparations, including the fruit, seed, leaves, root, bark and flowers.

Typical Preparations

Usually taken as capsules or a powder. For chronic conditions, use 1-2 grams per day; for acute uses, 6-8 grams per day.

Summary

In Ayurvedic medicine amla is considered to be aphrodisiac, anti-inflammatory, rejuvenative, a nutritive tonic, laxative, refrigerant, stomachic, hemostatic, and astringent. It is astoundingly high in vitamin C— with a pound of amla berries containing about 20-30 times more vitamin C than a pound of oranges— which of course makes it an extremely effective antioxidant. Studies have shown that if taken as a tonic for the eyes over a period of several years, it will reduce near-sightedness and help prevent cataracts, possibly because the high vitamin C content fights the free radicals that cause cataract formation. Its action against free radicals has also shown signs of being effective in preventing fibroids, protecting against melanoma, and inhibiting toxic conditions of the liver, and amla may indeed prove to be one of the premier anti-cancer herbs due to its cell-protecting qualities. Amla lowers blood cholesterol (although only temporarily unless dietary measures are also taken), enhances the functioning of the digestive system, regulates blood sugar, strengthens the teeth, hair and nails, and is used to treat a number of inflammatory conditions including hemorrhoids and gastritis. In India, the berries are

consumed raw after being soaked in salt water and turmeric to lessen the sour taste. Amla is also pickled as a digestive tonic, as well as being included either raw or cooked in a variety of dishes, including "Chyavanprash", a revitalizing jelly. Amla is believed to nourish the hair and so is often included in shampoos and treatments to prevent premature gray hair. The high tannin content also makes amla an excellent mordant, or fixative, for dyes, so it is frequently incorporated into inks.

Precautions

None known.