

Argan oil

Argania spinosa



It is **rich in essential nutrients, antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds**. Early research indicates that argan oil may help prevent chronic illnesses, including heart disease, diabetes and cancer. It may also treat a variety of skin conditions.

Argan oil is a natural oil extracted from the kernels of the argan tree (*Argania spinosa*), which is native to Morocco. Rich in fatty acids and antioxidants, argan oil is often used in skincare as an anti-aging product. Argan oil is also used for culinary purposes, the consumption of which is believed to have medical benefits, including the treatment of high blood pressure and diabetes.

Health Benefits

Argan oil is marketed for several different purposes, hair care and skin treatment chief among them. In recent years, argan oil has become so popular in cosmetics that the Moroccan government has stepped up efforts to increase the cultivation of argan tree groves. It's sometimes even called "liquid gold."¹

No less popular is argan oil's culinary uses. Consumers are not only drawn to its mild, spicy flavor (reminiscent of pumpkin seed oil),

but also its purported health benefits. As a polyunsaturated oil, it is considered heart-healthy with similar benefits to olive oil.

Skin Care

Proponents claim that argan oil can treat a broad range of skin conditions, including acne, eczema, psoriasis, burns, and skin infections. The high concentration of antioxidants in argan oil—including oleic acid and linoleic acid—has led some to claim that it can fight aging by neutralizing free radicals that damage cells.

Dermatologists also say that omega-3 fatty acids found in argan oil may boost collagen production and plump your skin, reducing fine lines and wrinkles.



In addition to its use in skin creams, lotions, serums, face masks, and ointments, argan oil is often incorporated into shampoos and conditioners or used as massage oil.

According to a 2015 study in *Clinical Interventions in Aging*, the topical use of argan oil in postmenopausal women led to a significant increase in the elasticity of the skin after 60 days. This effect was further enhanced by the oral consumption of argan oil in half of the participating women. While promising, note that conclusions were limited by the absence of a placebo control group.

Argan oil's benefit in treating burns and skin infections is far less certain. Although argan oil is known to have antibacterial properties,

it is unknown if the effect is potent enough to prevent infection or aid in healing.

A 2016 study in *Ostomy Wound Healing* hinted at a benefit, wherein rats treated for second-degree burns with argan oil appeared to heal faster than those treated with either 1% silver sulfadiazine (a standard burn cream) or a placebo. (Results of any animal research must be replicated in humans for them to be considered applicable.)



Hair Care

Argan oil is thought to improve hair quality by preventing damage to the exterior cuticle of the hair shaft while preserving the natural pigments (melanin) that provide hair its color.

According to a 2013 study from Brazil, argan oil was able to enhance hair quality and dye retention after undergoing multiple hair coloring treatments. Hair coloring is one of the harshest procedures hair can undergo, and argan oil appears to have a protective effect when compared to commercial hair conditioners.

Oral Therapeutic Uses

Some proponents believe that that consumption of argan oil can help treat or prevent certain medical conditions, including osteoarthritis, high blood pressure, diabetes, epilepsy, and atherosclerosis. To date, there are few scientific studies to support these claims.

A 2013 study in the *Journal of Complementary and Integrative Medicine* concluded that diabetic mice given argan oil experienced far greater reductions in blood sugar than untreated mice with the condition. Moreover, the oil appeared to stabilize blood pressure—

something that did not occur in the mice who did not receive treatment.

A similar study in Nutrition, Metabolism, and Cardiovascular Diseases reported that argan oil blunted the effects of obesity in mice fed a high-fat diet. Compared to untreated mice, those given argan oil had lower total cholesterol, triglycerides, glucose, insulin, and "bad" LDL cholesterol levels. With that being said, argan oil did not increase "good" HDL cholesterol levels vital to heart health.

Whether these same benefits can be replicated in humans has yet to be seen. Sadly, argan oil remains understudied compared to other heart-healthy polyunsaturated oils.



Possible Side Effects

Argan oil is generally considered safe for consumption and topical use. However, in some people, argan oil may cause a form of allergy known as contact dermatitis, characterized by the development of rash, redness, and itchiness at the site of application.²

Argan oil also contains tocopherols, a form of vitamin E, which may slow blood clotting and interact with anticoagulants like Coumadin (warfarin). Whether the concentration of tocopherols in argan oil is enough to instigate an interaction is unknown.

Dosage and Preparation

Argan oil is sold as a culinary ingredient and as a general health tonic. Oftentimes, there will be no discernible difference between the two options other than the price. Argan cooking oil is generally cheaper, although high-quality, cold-pressed oils can sometimes be as costly, ounce-per-ounce, as therapeutic oils.

There are no guidelines for the appropriate use of argan oil. When used topically, most manufacturers recommend dabbing a few drops onto the skin or massaging the oil into the scalp before combing it through your hair.



What to Look For

Argan oil and products that contain it can be found online and in many natural foods stores, drugstores, and specialty beauty shops. Bottles should be glass and have a dark tint (e.g., amber), which helps prevent deterioration of the oil that can occur with light exposure.

When used for therapeutic purposes, opt for organic cold-pressed oil whenever possible. Cold-pressing reduces the oxidation that can increase acidity in heat-pressed oils. The oil can then be refined to achieve a clear consistency and a characteristic yellowish-golden hue. Some argan oils are deodorized, the process of which doesn't affect the quality.

Organic oils should contain the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic certification.

Other Questions

Does argan oil expire?

Argan oil has a relatively long shelf life (up to two years), although the quality can be affected by extreme heat and ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun.

To avoid this, store argan oil in its original glass container in a cool room away from direct sunlight. Keeping it in the refrigerator can help preserve the oil. While it will congeal, it will return to normal once allowed to come to room temperature

Dispose of any oil that is past its expiration date, has a rancid odor, or suddenly becomes cloudy or discolored.

How can I use argan oil in cooking?

Argan oil can be used like olive oil or any other cooking oil. However, because of its price—roughly \$30 for an 8-ounce (250-milliliter) bottle—most people prefer drizzling it on pasta, couscous, stews, salads, and other prepared dishes. Some argan oils are made from lightly toasted kernels that give the oil an appealing nutty flavor. Toasting does reduce some of the nutritional value, but not enough to undermine its dietary benefits.

