

Calabash tree

Calabash Tree, Crescentia Cujete, Huingo, Kalebas, Krabasi, Rum Tree, Tutumo



The syrup prepared from the pulp is used as a medicine for relieving disorders of the chest or respiratory tract and also to cure dysentery and stomach aches. The leaves of the Calabash Tree are used to reduce blood pressure. The decoction of the tree bark is used to clean wounds and also to treat hematomas and tumors.

The calabash tree is actually an umbrella term for six different species of the Bignoniaceae family. All of them are trees with flowers native to Central America and the Caribbean but also the southern part of the United States of America and the northern areas of South America. They can reach a maximum height of about 10 m and are known for their round fruits. These are very big, with a diameter of up to 25 cm, and have soft pulp underneath a thin but very strong outer shell.

The tree has a rough and irregular bark but its leaves tend to be simple in design. It is a dicotyledonous species and the leaves can be found either on shoots in clusters or in an alternate arrangement. Fruits are inedible but look very nice and make the calabash tree an interesting ornamental plant. The fruit has a hard shell of an impressive size and remains green even after it becomes ripe, which can take about half a year. The fruits grow straight from the main trunk of the tree. Unlike most other plants that are pollinated by insects, this tree relies mostly on bats. Fruits have small seeds that can be found inside their pulp.

The calabash tree is considered the national tree of the small Caribbean island nation of St. Lucia. Besides its original range, it has also been introduced in India and a number of other Asian countries, as well as Africa. The fruit has many different names in Mexico, some of these are Guaje, Morro, Huacal Bule, Tecomate or Jícara. Its hard shell is used to craft small vessels that can be used as cups or plates.

Parts used

Fruits, bark, leaves.



Uses

The calabash tree is often used in the traditional medicine of the Philippines as a jack of all trades, with different communities using it to treat several diseases. The leaves are a cure against stomach problems and diarrhea but also to reduce high blood pressure. The fruit is mainly a treatment for respiratory problems of any kind, like asthma, bronchitis, cough or even common cold. However, the locals also believe it to have the ability to reduce blood sugar, relieve inflammation and act as a laxative. The fruit is considered a panacea because of its numerous health benefits and in the southern part of the country it's even named the miracle fruit.

The calabash tree is most often used in the treatment of internal problems, digestive issues or respiratory difficulties. However, many people are convinced the plant can also balance high blood pressure, kill some of the most dangerous types of bacteria like *Staphylococcus aureus*, as well as boost the body's production of insulin. It is certain that it can also start labor prematurely, so pregnant women should avoid taking calabash (*Crescentia cujete*) supplements. In general, this herb has powerful effects and it is always wise to ask for the advice of a doctor before using it.

Crescentia cujete is known in several areas to be an effective cure for respiratory issues, including asthma or viral influenza. It directly inhibits the cough and strong spasms that are among the worst problems caused by these diseases. It can be combined with other herbs with various complementary effects in order to prepare a very strong mixture. According to some researchers, calabash tree can also eliminate staph infections.

The second well-known use of the calabash tree is as a cure for digestive and gastric issues. Many of these are often caused by intestinal spasms, which eventually lead

to diarrhea or chronic pain. The anti-spasm properties of the herb are again very useful for this purpose. A concentrated calabash tree tea can also trigger vomiting if needed.

Crescentia cujete has also been found to reduce high blood pressure after a period of daily use. Long-term usage is also good for diabetes patients, since it increase the amount of insulin produced by the human body. It is considered a general detoxifier and blood purifier by some cultures.

The calabash tree fruits can be transformed into an effective syrup for cough or colds, after boiling it in water with added sugar. It also acts like an expectorant, aperient and laxative. Leaves have a coagulant effect and can be used as a primitive remedy in the wild by applying them directly on wounds in order to stop bleeding. Crushed leaves are also purgative or laxative in combination with castor oil.



Indians prepare a poultice from the pulp of the fruits, which can be put directly on the chest to treat various conditions. Natives of the Caribbean also employ the pulp as a pectoral remedy but they sometimes transform it into a syrup that can treat skin problems and dysentery. In some areas of Brazil, constipation is cured with an extract from the unripe *Crescentia cujete* fruits.

The fruit has several other applications in skin diseases. The pulp can be boiled until it becomes a black paste, when vinegar is added and the mixture is boiled again. Linen can be soaked in the resulting paste and applied on the skin against erysipelas. Both in West Africa and the West Indies, the macerated fruit is used to treat several problems, like fever, burns or head pain. Diarrhea can be treated using the bark, while the pulp is an effective expectorant or laxative.

Cultures around the world have identified a wide range of medical uses of the calabash tree. Africans fry the fruit in ash before using it as a diuretic or purgative, leaves can also be diuretic if ingested. Sumatra natives clean open wounds with decocts from the bark and apply crushed leaves on the head as a poultice to relieve pain. All around the Caribbean islands, the herb is known to relieve pain and inflammation and a mixture made from ground fresh leaves and shoots is applied on wounds to speed up cicatrization. A decoction of bark is popular in Venezuela to cure hematomas, diarrhea or even tumours.

The purgative effect is known in Costa Rica, while the diuretic one is used in the Ivory Coast to reduce high blood pressure. Columbians used it for respiratory problems. It has many uses in Vietnam, where *Crescentia cujete* treats bronchitis, cough, asthma, diarrhea, urethritis and stomach pain and is known for its properties as an antitussive, laxative and expectorant.

The calabash tree fruit is included in the arsenal of the natural remedies used by the traditional medicine of Haiti. It is a general panacea in Cuba's Camaguey province and named totumo in the Panama, where it treats stomach pain as well as diarrhea. In many areas of the world, *Crescentia cujete* is known to decrease blood pressure. Other attested uses are: laxative, anti-inflammatory, febrifuge. It can also treat toothaches, irregular menstruation, bronchitis and other breathing problems.

Constituents

Modern research has identified a number of bioactive compounds after a chemical analysis of the calabash tree. Flavonoids like anthraquinone and quercetin can be found in both the leaves and the fruit of the herb. These play an important role in anti-angiogenic processes, which control the development of the blood vessel network of the body. They can also divert the blood flow away from tumours, which deprives tumours of nutrients and can eventually kill them. Tumours develop from a single cell that multiplies out of control, after many processes of division. This can't happen if the flow of nutrients to the area is stopped.

Side effects and cautions

Like many other herbal supplements, pregnant or nursing women should ask for medical advice before ingesting *Crescentia cujete*. It has been used by tribal cultures to force labor and might cause strong uterine contractions that are very dangerous for the mother and her child. It should not be taken as a supplement in order to avoid miscarriage.

While potent, herbal remedies like the calabash tree are not an alternative to conventional medical drugs and should only be used after an advice from a real doctor. It has not been properly studied and could have unknown side effects, especially when taken by patients with existing medical conditions. There is also a risk of unwanted side effects when combined with other drugs or herbal cures.



