

Some herbs beginning with G.....

By Gisela Gibbon

Guaiacum

(Guaiacum officinalis)

Synonym: Lignum Vitae

French: Bois de gaïac

German: Gajakbaum

Guajacum is an ornamental evergreen tree from the Bahamas and South Florida, with bright, blue flowers, and it can grow, albeit slowly, up to 20 metres high. The wood is dark green, extremely hard and heavy, and has traditionally been used by wood turners when weight is not a problem.

Pestles, rulers, skittle boards and black sheaves (the grooved wheels used for pulleys) are often made from it.

Medically Guajacum is very useful in relieving the pain of rheumatism, gout, even rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, and, if taken continuously, the frequency of arthritic attacks should lessen.

It is also a natural anti-mercurial agent, and therefore useful for those suffering from dental mercury poisoning, it also helps against unpleasant, overpowering body- odour, psoriasis, eczema, boils abscesses and scrofula.

In the 16th and 17th century it used to be a frequent remedy for secondary syphilis.

It is said to combine well with Sarsaparilla (g1:s2, *Thomas Bartram*).

Guarana

(Paullinia cupana)

(Paullinia sorbilis)

Synonyms: Brazilian Cocoa

Isn't it odd that this legendary and sacred fruit of the Amazon Indians can now be bought in tincture or capsule form in most health food shops?

And that it is even an ingredient in fashionable energy drinks? Shame that the mystery has therefore disappeared a bit, but what a boon that such an energiser is available to us all.

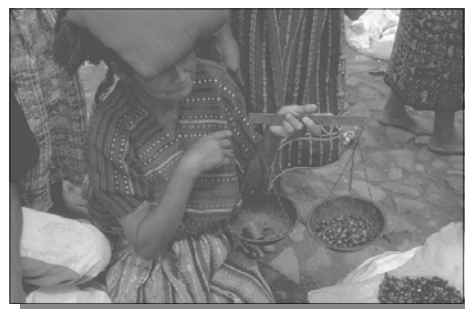
The climbing Guarana shrub got its genus name from C.F. Paullini, a German medical botanist who died in 1712. It is the seeds of *Paullinia sorbilis* which are used, they look like a small horse-chestnut, and often mixed with those of *P. cupana*. They are first shelled and washed, then roasted for six hours.

Traditionally they were then put into sacks and shaken until the outer shell came off, after which they were pounded into a fine powder. This powder was then made into a dough with water and rolled into cylindrical pieces 8 inches long, which were again dried in the sun or over a slow fire until they became a very hard, reddish brown marbled mass.

The Brazilian miners would take these guarana sticks, resembling oil free bitter chocolate, on their travels, and would make a revitalising beverage by grating half a teaspoon of it into sugary water and drink this like tea.

It was usual for the miners to carry a palate bone or scale of a large fish in their pockets, with which to grate it.

Paullinia cupana has for a long time been a favourite national diet drink especially popular with the Orinoco Indians -, the seeds are mixed with Cassava and water, and left to ferment until almost putrid.



So we know Guarana as a caffeine- like energiser, but the tannin it contains is also useful for mild forms of leucorrhoea, diarrhoea, etc. It is great for irritable or depressed states due to mental exertion, or fatigue and exhaustion from hot weather. It is useful for sick or nervous headaches, weakness during menstruation, and headaches caused by rheumatism in the neck. Guarana, however, is not recommended for chronic headaches, when suffering from high blood pressure or heart rhythm disorders and should not be taken with Ginseng.

Guarana helps against stress, jet-lag, nervous depression, mental fatigue, it is a gentle aphrodisiac, diuretic, relaxant and overall tonic.

Guar Gum

(from the Indian Bean

Chyamopsis

tetragonopus)

A very interesting substance. Those of us who are avid label readers will recognise guar gum as a thickener and emulsifier in yoghurts, ice creams and other puddings. Far from it just being some useless rubbery substance, it actually serves as a great equaliser for sugar metabolism.

The guar gum powder, when mixed with water, forms a sticky gel which slows down sugar absorption.

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It increases insulin sensitivity and benefits blood fat levels, body weight and helps to reduce blood pressure, as it also helps to reduce cholesterol. All in all excellent for all who are watching their weight, or those who are diabetic. Guar gum also reduces the risk of kidney stones, and can be sprinkled directly onto food or into a glass of water - the granules need fluid to swell in the abdomen.

Obviously those who suffer from any kind of obstructions of the intestines or diseases of the gut must stay well away from it, and the excessive use of the capsule form should be avoided, as it can have a huge bloating effect, lead to diarrhoea and poor absorption of nutrients. No more than 15 g daily should be taken - beware of slimming capsules which offer 2000 mg per capsule and recommend 12 - 16 capsules daily.

It is also important to note that this must not be given to children as the swelling may cause obstruction in the throat - even for adults this must be a note of caution. Those suffering from irritable bowel syndrome must also take care, and if at all, try very small doses first. Prescribed by a practitioner it can be a useful aid to even out sugar levels and of some help against obesity.

Please remember - the history and uses of herbs are recounted because they are a fascinating part of the world we live in, not to encourage the uninitiated to experiment with herbal medicine. Please take advice from a qualified herbalist and always check with your doctor if you are receiving medical treatment.