

Argan Tree

Argania spinosa (L.) Skeels, Sapotaceae

Argan trees are thorny shrubs found exclusively in Morocco, along a narrow strip of land on the Atlantic coastline.

Their knotty trunk is sometimes made up of several intertwined stems. Their leaves are small, lanceolate, evergreen, tough, and paler underneath than on top. The trees blossom between May and June and the flowers are hermaphrodite and greenish yellow in color. The fruit of Argan trees are green, oval drupes containing an almond with a fleshy, oil-producing albumen.

TRADITION

Argan trees have an essentially family-oriented role in the area it comes from. The oil from its fruit is used as a food and for medicinal purposes. Its leaves, fruit pulp and cakes remaining after the oil extracting process are used to feed cattle. Argan trees are also used for wood for heating and to make tools.

The berries are traditionally harvested and sun-dried to make argan oil. Once the fruits are dry, their pulp is taken out and the nuts are hand-crushed. Finally, the nuts are sorted, roasted at low heat, and crushed. The dough obtained is then treated in warm water. The oil then separates and floats on top and then can be collected. The oil is initially brown but becomes clearer as it is decanted. The oil is all the more precious as it takes 100kg (220 pounds) of fresh fruit to make 2kg (4.4 pounds) of oil.

STORIES AND LEGENDS

The genus name for argan trees, *Argania*, comes from its name in Berber 'ârgan.' Its species name, *spinosa*, means 'thorny.'

Here is a story about a typical and original method of harvesting the nuts: goats, who are very keen on the fruit of argan trees, actually climb into the trees to reach them. They digest the pericarp and excrete the nuts, which are then picked by farmers to make oil (only used locally!).

COMPOSITION

Argan tree seeds are used to make argan oil. The cakes are made from the manufacturing waste corresponding to the remains of the nuts.

PHARMACEUTICS

In traditional medicine, argan oil is prescribed for atherosclerosis and hypercholesterolemia. It is also used to

fight rheumatisms, heal burns, treat eczema and juvenile acne. It is regenerating and is applied locally to irritations and chaps. It is also hypolipidemiating and anti-hypertensive.

The fruit's pericarp, nut, and cakes also have traditional medicinal uses: daily consumption of the nuts is thus recommended for diabetes patients. The use of the pericarp and nuts are recommended in topical applications for problems relating to the skin and scalp (nettle rash, parasites, fungus). The cakes are also applied in poultices to treat sprains and wounds.

Recent studies have revealed the analgesic, anti-inflammatory, and anti-microbial properties of the saponins contained in the cakes.

FOOD

Moroccans use argan oil as a "table oil." It can be used as such, on bread for breakfast for example, as a cooking oil or as seasoning for various dishes.

It is an ingredient in 'amlo,' which is made with honey and roasted almonds, and is known to have an aphrodisiac effect. It is also traditionally used in 'almandaq,' a strengthening recipe for children, made with barley semolina. Its high concentration in essential and polyunsaturated fatty acids give the argan oil interesting nutritional and dietary properties. It could find uses in specific food-related fields for example in food supplements to stimulate the skin's beauty.

COSMETICS

Berber women use argan oil to protect themselves from the sun, wind, and sand. The oil is also traditionally used as an anti-wrinkle active.

Argan oil is softening and an emollient, it moisturizes and nourishes the skin. It can be used as an ingredient to repair dry skin, moisturizing hand creams, and emulsions for stressed and dull skin. The antioxidant activity of the tocopherols (vitamin E) present in the unsaponifiable fraction makes argan oil ideal in protective and anti-aging care. It is strengthening and can be used in nail care for split or fragile nails. It is also used in hair unctons to preserve the hair's beauty. **MS**

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