

Mopane (*Colophospermum mopane*)

Description and Distribution

The mopane tree is common in many arid areas of southern Africa. It grows in hot, dry, low-lying areas in alkaline soil. They range from shrubs to tall trees, with distinctive butterfly-shaped leaves and kidney-shaped seeds. To adapt to the heat the leaves fold together during the hot afternoon hours and only open again in the late afternoon to photosynthesis. (1)



Harvesting

Until recently the mopane seeds have not had much use, unlike the rest of the tree. Now the seeds are collected between June and September, once the fruits have matured and dropped. Up to ten tons of seeds are collected annually. The seeds are then steam distilled to extract the essential oil. The seeds are high in crude protein, but animals do not generally eat them due to the resin found on the seeds which makes them unpalatable. This oil has antifungal, antiseptic, anti-inflammatory, antibiotic, diuretic and antimalarial properties.(1)

Products of mopane

The wood of the mopane is used as firewood, timber and making utensils. The bark is used for tanning and to produce rope. The tree also attracts a worm which is edible and highly nutritious. The mopane is also used traditionally for medicinal purposes, such as treating a sore eye, chafed inner thighs, stomach pains, and kidney stones. The leaves are traditionally used for disinfecting wounds and reducing bleeding by promoting clotting. The essential oil produced from the seeds, the leaves and the bark is high in crude proteins (reportedly to improve immune response, cell repair, help with blood cell formation and tissue repair), calcium, phosphorus and essential fatty acids. This oil is used in many cosmetic and skin-care products.(1) The oil also contains terpenoids which aid in the repellence of mosquitos. (2) (3)



References

1. Indigenous Natural Products in Namibia
2. <http://mukwatioils.com/products/turpentine-tree-oil/>
3. <http://desert-secrets.com/content/products/body-care>