

Back to Nature: Having a Need for Neem

by Dr. Reese Halter

Of the more than 80,000 tree species on our planet, the Indian neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) is magnificent and known by millions of people as the village pharmacy. Imagine one kind of tree that offers medicine, cosmetics, rope, tea, glue, wood, fertilizer, pesticides and insecticides, lubricant, lighting and heating oil, veterinary medicine and shade. Welcome to the neem tree.



Neem is native to India and Burma. It grows from the southern Indian tip of Kerala to the Himalayan hills. It spans both tropical and subtropical latitudes, from wet tropical to semi arid regions and from sea level to 2,300 feet elevation. It does not tolerate cold temperatures or saturated soils.

These evergreen beauties can easily reach 100 feet in height with impressive regal crowns and 8 feet girths. They are very fast growing trees that are able to re-colonize denuded and infertile soils. Their profuse white mellifluous flowers bear fruit that at first glance resembles an olive.

Neem has been introduced to over 30 countries around the globe including the following states in the U.S; Arizona, California, Florida and Hawaii. Neem is particularly important in the developing world. It provides shade throughout the year and only in extreme droughts does it shed its leaves. Neem plantations provide employment and help generate income in rural communities.

Moreover, the developing world is utilizing the tremendous ability of neem to successfully combat encroaching desertification, deforestation and rising greenhouse gases.

For 3,000 years the Indian Ayurveda shamans have known of neem's potent insecticide, pesticide and medicinal properties. Extracts of neem are effective against at least 200 different insect species including locust, mosquitoes carrying malaria and voracious Australian blowflies.



Neem residue can be sprinkled on the soil, taken up by plant roots and used by crops as a plant defense mechanism, for up to 10 weeks, against insect infestations. There is no trace of neem residue in crops. Furthermore, pollinators like bees, moths and bats as well as beneficial insects such as spiders, ladybugs and dragonflies, nor any known warm-blooded animals or birds are harmed from neem extracts. Azatin, Align and Margosan-O are all neem-based products that protect crops.

Neem is truly one of Mother Nature's most remarkable trees.

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