

Black Walnut

by Ingrid Naiman

Due to the many misunderstandings regarding who said what and how black walnut is to be used, I hit the books. As always, Maude Grieve was wonderful. The botanical name of the American black walnut is *Juglans nigra*. The European nut is probably of Persian origin. Grieve states that the species known as *Juglans regia* can be found far to the East of Persia: to the Hindu Kush, Kashmir, and Sikkim. The tree was grown throughout the Roman Empire. It was described by Varro (born c. 116 A.D.)

The Romans called the tree "nux" because of its fruit. The name walnut is of German or Teutonic origin and means something foreign (welsche). The botanical name is more interesting. *Juglans* comes from *Jovis glans*, Jupiter's nuts, which continues to be a name by which walnut is known in some parts (no pun intended.)

The two species, *nigra* and *regia*, contain the same quinone, juglone, so authorities that I checked believe the plants possess similar if not identical medicinal properties. Juglone is not only antiparasitic but antifungal and antimicrobial. This is found in all parts of the tree and it inhibits competitive growth around the tree.

The herbal medicine is made from the hulls that encase the nut and it is generally regarded as safe to consume black walnut at the recommended dosages for two weeks. Prolonged use is discouraged.

My Early Studies

When first trying to understand black walnut, I consulted a number of reputable sources. Weiss says that walnut is a common household remedy for skin conditions such as eczema, scrofula, and inflammation, but he prefers wild pansy. Weiner cites the Cherokee use as an anthelmintic (vermifuge), most particularly for tapeworms. He suggests the oil of the fruit whereas some use the inner bark and most today use the green hull. All sources seem to concur that walnut is one of the mildest and surest laxatives, causing no nausea, irritation, or pain. Some recommend that use of this preparation be followed by something stronger such as pinkroot or even calmyrna figs (which supposedly can rip the skin of worms.)

Grieve says the bark and leaves of the walnut can be used in most skin diseases, basically everything from eczema to herpes and syphilis. Stronger doses have a purgative effect. More importantly, Grieve states that the unripe nut has "worm-destroying virtues." Ergo, the idea did not originate with Hulda Clark or Hanna Kroeger or any of the more controversial figures of the late 20th century.

Grieve makes fascinating reading. She goes on to mention vinegar walnut gargles for sore and ulcerated throats, catsup made of walnuts having properties similar to the unripe nuts. After reading what she wrote, I thought that perhaps the macrobiotic people use sesame oil (in part as an antiparasitic protocol) while the French use walnut oil. Grieve says the leaves contain iodine and are a powerful insect repellent. Then, if the husks and leaves are macerated in warm water, the taste is intensely bitter and the concoction will kill all

worms (so use it on your antique furniture?) She said the liquid made in this way can be poured on lawns without injuring the grass itself. Grieve has lots of marvelous sounding recipes including one using the juice of the green hulls, boiled with honey (well, those of us conditioned by Ayurveda will add the honey at the last minute when there is still a chance of blending it with the other liquid.) She recommends this as a gargle for sore throats. She also states that walnut has been called the “vegetable arsenic” because of its curative powers with skin diseases.

Doctrine of Signatures

Then, the doctrine of signatures refers to the similarity between the walnut and the head: the outer husk of green covering represents the pericranium . . . ergo “salt made of those husks or barks are good for wounds of the head.” The inner woody shell resembles the skull and the little yellow peel (inside the walnut) corresponds to the meninges and pia-mater. The kernel has the same appearance as the brain and is therefore “profitable to the brain and resists poisons.” Quoting William Cole (1657), “if the kernel be bruised and moistened with wine and laid upon the crown of the head, it comforts the brain and head mightily.” There are fascinating recipes, so interesting that I think I’ll post them when I have a chance. Lastly, Peter Holmes, my friend and sometimes mentor, a most scholarly man: he is lengthy, not any longer than Grieve, but says the uses include (1) lymphatic congestions, eczema, and tumors (metabolic toxicosis with damp cold); (2) blood deficiencies and demineralization; (3) intestinal parasites (especially round and tapeworms) and diabetes; and (4) tissue repair, bacterial and fungal skin infections, bone degeneration. Peter goes on to discuss Walnut liqueur (from green nut -- not hull) as a traditional European aperitif and many other uses. I have found nothing to explain the reference to intestinal flora by one producer, but given that they could probably sell 20 times more by referencing parasites, probably did not pull the idea out of thin air.

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