Rupa and Manu Play with the Devil's Claws

Shikha Hajela

beautiful basket is woven. These are actually the seed pods or the fruits of a plant “Martynia annua”, a native of Mexico, which actually resemble a tiger or a devil’s claw, and hence the name, “Devil’s claw”. This plant is also found in India, and is commonly known as “Baghnakha” in Hindi. Saying this, he took out some dried seed pods from his bag which he had got for them.

Later in the afternoon, after lunch, Bantu mama settled down with Rupa and Manu again, who were busy playing with the fascinating fruits. “Tell us more about this unusual plant mama”, said Rupa, snuggling in his arms. “I was expecting this”, he said smiling and started with the interesting description, the information which he had painstakingly gathered for Rupa and Manu only.

“Tell us more about this unusual plant mama”, said Rupa, snuggling in his arms. “I was expecting this”, he said smiling and started with the interesting description, the information which he had painstakingly gathered for Rupa and Manu only.

"Do you know, this basket is made of Devil's claws", informed Bantu mama. "Are you kidding, Devil’s claws for such a beautiful thing, how big was the Devil, what was he doing in Mexico, how did people catch the Devil......" enquired Rupa in one single breath. "Hey, wait, it's not actually from a Devil, but the name is given to the fruit from which this

When dried, the devil's claw seed capsules are used for making baskets, as a vegetable crop or substitute for cucumber pickles, as an art design for bizarre little creatures, or just for their beautiful flowers and unusual seed pods.

Turn overleaf to find out more about them.
DEVIL'S CLAWS FROM
Hitchhikers on Big Animals

Martynia annua

Kingdom: Plantae
Family: Martyniaceae
Genus: Martynia
Species: M. annua
Family: Martyniaceae

mar-TIN-eu-uh, named for Dr. John Martyn, Professor of Botany at Cambridge University
AN-yoo-uh, meaning, annual

Commonly known as:
Devil's claw, Ice plant, Tiger's-claw
- Bengali: baghnaakhi
- Hindi: baghnakh, hatha-jori, ulat-kanta
- Kannada: garuda muugu mulu, huli nakha, huli ugru
- Malayalam: puli-nakham
- Marathi: vinchu
- Oriya: baghanakhi
- Sanskrit: kakanosha
- Tamil: puli-nakam, tet-kotukki
- Telugu: garudamukku

Where am I found?
I am a native of Mexico and Central America, introduced and naturalized in the tropics. Within India, I am found throughout, in waste places, rubbish heaps and along road sides.

How do I look like?
I produce strange seed pods that attach to the feet and legs of large animals, and include some of the largest hitchhiker fruits in the world. My fruit is technically a drupeaceous capsule with a woody inner part surrounded by a fleshy layer. The rather sinister common name of "devil's claw" or "tiger's claw" refers to the inner woody capsule which splits open at one end into two curved horns or claws. Each capsule contains about 40 black seeds which are gradually released when the claws split apart. They are also called "elephant tusks" and readily cling to the hooves of grazing animals or your shoes if you happen to step on them. The fresh green pods (and dried black seed capsules) were important items in the cultures of many Native American tribes of the southwestern United States, and are still used to this day for food and in basketry. The sun-bleached seed capsule of Martynia, with its short, fang-like claws, superficially resembles the upper jaw and skull of a pit viper.
I am a bushy annual herb of 2 metres height. My leaves are kidney-shaped to circular, mostly 6-15 cm wide, both surfaces equally hairy, margins with shallow lobes; leaf stalk 9-14 cm long. Pod green and fleshy at first, drying to a black woody capsule. Seeds brown to black, 2 to each pod. Distinguished by leaves and stems covered with sticky glandular hairs; leaves pumpkin-like; flowers tubular, 4-6 cm long, predominantly white to pink with 5 spreading lobes at the apex, each lobe with a prominent purple spot, throat with red and yellow spots, fertile stamens 2; pod to 4 cm long and to 1.5 cm wide, with recurved claws about 1 cm long. Flowers in several flowered racemes. Flowers are bell shaped, purplish white, with dark purple markings. The yellow lines in the corolla throat are nectar guide lines to direct pollinator bees to the nectar source.

Dispersal: Spread by seeds that remain in the pod and are transported when the hooked fruits catch on passing animals or objects.

What are my Medicinal Uses?

- In India the plant has been known long enough for it to constitute part of the traditional pharmacopeia.
- My leaf juice is gargled for sore throats, oil from my fruits and seeds is smeared onto scabies infections.
- A paste of the seeds and fruits is thought to be effective for bites of venomous insects and scorpions, and more.
- The roots are crushed with lemon and used as medicine.
- Leaves are used to remove insects from fowl in Mexico and Guatemala, and my fruits are used medicinally in the former country.
- To ward off bed bugs, chopped aerial parts are kept inside the beds; to kill lice and bugs in cattle sheds, plants are strewn in the cattle sheds.
- Leaves eaten in time of scarcity; also used for epilepsy.
- For Nail pain: Fruits are rubbed with water to make paste and is applied locally.

AYURVEDIC PROPERTIES AND ACTION -
Rasa : Madhura  Guna : sita
Virya : sita  Vipaka : Madhura
Action: Pittaghna, Dardhyakara, Rasayana

IMPORTANT FORMULATION - Chyavanprash
Eating Well

A Poem

Start your day with water to drink,
Plain or warm or hot, to the brim.
Have glasses in plural,
with a dash of lime and honey or 'tea in green' but no sugar.

Have in breakfast what your heart desires, eat like a king;
your table well spread with plenty a colour and thing.
Whole carbohydrates, fat and protein,
fruits, confectionery, a dash of butter, seeds and bean.

Lunch should be functional and light,
A perfect balance of what is traditional yet right.
Add a green salad before you lunch,
make sure you don't have too much to munch.

At dinner eat like a pauper,
a salad, a soup, something light but proper.
Minimize your 'carbs' they say,
Add lots of protein, yoghurt or whey.

In between your meals have nothing,
except if it is fruit or a low calorie something.
Remember to walk and drink plenty of water, Hydrate.
More so if the days get hotter.

Guava Power Drink

Guava is a natural laxative as it is high in fibre and can help you if you are having digestive problems like constipation. This unusual concoction is a powerhouse of vitamin C and fibre. Have it with your afternoon snack to complement a chat-pata dish. Remember to use fully ripened guavas as they taste the best and also you need to add less sugar to this drink thus making it healthier.

Preparation Time : 10 minutes
Cooking Time : 20 minutes
Serves : 6

Ingredients:
- 2 large Guavas
- 1/4 cup Sugar
- 1/2 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon ginger juice

Method:
- Wash and cut the guavas into large cubes.
- Place these in a saucepan along with the sugar and 1 and 1/2 cups of water.
- Bring to a boil and simmer till the guavas are tender.
- Cool completely and puree in a blender.
- Add the ginger juice and lemon juice and mix well.
- Fill half a glass with the pulp and top up with chilled water or ice-cubes and serve immediately.
- Repeat to make 5 more drinks.

Tips:
- You can also make a large batch when guavas are in season. Store the guava pulp in a sterilised bottle and refrigerate. Use as required.
- The easiest way to make ginger juice is to grate the ginger and squeeze out the juice.