

passionflower.

This herb offers a safe, effective alternative to conventional anti-anxiety drugs, says **Tamara Skok.**

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and menopausal symptoms respond well to passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*), as does period pain. A calming remedy which gently 'takes the edge off', it works by increasing levels of a chemical called gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) in the brain, which makes you feel more relaxed. It is suitable for children and teens, and useful for anxiety - one study of people with generalised anxiety disorder found that passionflower was just as effective as the drug oxazepam (Serax) - restlessness and insomnia (especially when caused by nightmares, an overactive imagination, or paranoia), muscle spasms, leg cramps, and digestive problems. It is a vasodilatory, making it beneficial for palpitations and hypertension. Its effects are not as pronounced as other anti-anxiety herbs, such as kava; it may be combined with valerian, lemon balm or

other sedative, calmativie herbs in both over-the-counter and prescribed blends. The flowers, leaves and stems are used medicinally. Recommended dosages are: **Tea:** Steep 0.5-2g (about 1 teaspoon) of dried herb in 1 cup boiling water for 10 minutes. Strain and cool. For anxiety, drink 3-4 cups daily. For insomnia, drink 1 cup before bed.

Fluid extract (1:1 in 25% alcohol): 10-30 drops, three times daily.

Tincture (1:5 in 45% alcohol): 10-60 drops, three times daily.

Caution: If you are taking sedatives or blood-thinners, consult your health practitioner before taking passionflower. Avoid if pregnant or breastfeeding.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Passionflower was first brought to Europe from Brazil by Jesuit priests. It is said to be named in honour of the Passion of Christ: the flower's three styles symbolise the three nails used in the crucifixion, and the five hammer-like anthers on the stamens represent the five hammers used to drive in the nails.



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green business.

In a gloomy economy, it's good for the soul to know that there are companies championing sustainable and ethical business practices. **Jayne Tancred** reports.



When researchers compared the antioxidant activity of 55 medicinal herbs, olive leaf came out ahead of green tea.

As I make my way up the driveway of Olive Leaf Australia, I spy a row of tents which I assume is where farm workers are camped. Instead, the 'campsite' turns out to be home to thousands of worms which feed on the olive leaves after the world-famous medicine is extracted from them, creating a liquid fertiliser that's placed back onto the trees so that they can source their nutrients as nature intended - from the composting of their own leaf fall. This grand-daddy of all worm farms produces enough worm wee to feed half a million olive trees, spread out over 400 acres - it's also the first of many examples of 'giving back' that I encounter on my visit.

Success story

Since selling its first bottle of olive leaf extract (OLE) in 2001, Olive Leaf Australia now sells over 1,000 bottles a day in Australia and exports to 20-plus countries. Like most 'overnight

rainforest restorer.

The secret of perfect skin may be this rich oil from the Brazilian buriti palm. **Ann Johnston** reports.

Called 'the tree of life' in its native Brazil, the nuts of the elegant buriti palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*) are the source of an exceptional oil that protects the skin from the sun and may even repair sun damage.

What sets buriti oil apart is that it contains the highest known concentration of beta-carotene – higher even than carrot oil – which is what gives the oil its red-orange colour. This beta-carotene has extremely high bioavailability: animal studies published in the *Journal of the Brazilian Chemical Society* indicate this is probably due to the oil's unusually rich complement of essential fatty acids (EFAs), carotenoids and tocopherols.

Buriti's carotenoids and EFAs make it an excellent restorative and protective treatment for the skin; indeed, natives of the region traditionally used the oil to protect their skin and to treat burns and

sunburn. One particular EFA, linolenic acid, is thought to protect the fibroblast cells that support collagen and elastin. The carotenoids shield the skin from the sun's effects, and according to a study by biologist Nivea Maria de Paula Fernandes, reported in *Amazon News*, buriti oil filters and absorbs UV rays that cause skin cancer. Buriti oil is very effective for mature, ageing, dry or cracked skin, as it improves skin elasticity. It also benefits sun-damaged skin and hair, and may help treat psoriasis and eczema. Aveda, Surya and The Body Shop are using buriti in their ranges – visit organicbeautyworld.com.au.

Buriti oil has the highest known concentration of beauty-boosting beta-carotene – even more than carrot oil.



VITAMIN A POWER

Beta-carotene is a precursor of vitamin A. A study in *Ecology of Food and Nutrition* has found buriti to be effective in preventing xerophthalmia, a nutritional disease of the eye associated with vitamin A deficiency.



sensations', however, the business is the fruit of many years of hard work. When founder Ray Archer noticed people drinking olive leaf tea during a Mediterranean trip in the 1990s, he became interested in its medicinal potential. Committed to producing an extract with the greatest medicinal activity possible, Archer tested over 60 olive varieties from a dozen countries; the variant of the species with the highest antioxidant yield remains a closely-held family secret to this day.

While the Archers sold Olive Leaf Australia to New Zealand natural products company Comvita several years ago, the family's commitment to charitable giving is still evident: when I was there, a donation of OLE had just left for Africa, destined to support the immune systems of orphans affected by HIV/AIDs. The company also actively seeks consumer feedback on their products, and holds thousands of testimonials detailing the beneficial results that people experience. This information is used to guide research with the University of Queensland (UQ), Southern Cross University (SCU), and other organisations.

References available on request.

LATEST RESEARCH

Antioxidant power In tests measuring antioxidant activity (oxygen radical absorbance capacity and total antioxidant capacity), OLE scores off the scale, rating four times higher than vitamin C, six times higher than goji berry juice, and a whopping 112 times higher than fresh wild blueberries.

Fresh is best Over 20 antioxidants have been identified in olive leaves, but many don't survive the drying process. Comparisons of extracts from fresh and dried leaves show fresh leaf products have six times more antioxidant activity.

Broad-spectrum antimicrobial effects Olive leaf is traditionally taken for colds, flu and minor infections; this remains its most popular use. It also shows antimicrobial activity against a range of disease-causing organisms, including cold and flu viruses.

Cardiovascular health OLE supports heart health via a number of mechanisms, including reducing oxidation of LDL ("bad") cholesterol, inhibiting formation of blood clots, and helping to keep blood vessels dilated. It may be beneficial if you have hypertension or cholesterol problems – ask your health professional.

Skin health Preliminary research suggests taking OLE increases skin elasticity and helps to protect it from the effects of UV radiation. However, more research is needed before these benefits are confirmed.