Native to North America, the balsam fir, or Abies balsamea L., is a majestic conical evergreen that typically grows to between 50 and 80 feet, with a narrow conical crown. It produces aromatic needle-like leaves and characteristic purple fir cones. Primarily recognized as our beloved Christmas tree, its liquid resin has long been prized for its many potent therapeutic properties. In fact, balsam fir gum has an extensive and well-documented history of therapeutic use in North America and throughout Europe.

History tells us that it was the native Indians who first introduced French settlers to the many medicinal uses they made of balsam fir: as a flu remedy, for sore throats and coughs, as well as for the treatment of cuts, burns and sores. So effective was balsam fir in fact, that the harvest of pine gum quickly spread among trappers under French rule, and it became a staple of popular medicine in early French Canadian culture.

As far as its medicinal properties go, the balsam fir offers unique therapeutic benefits which are specific to each of its medicinally active parts - needles, resin, roots, branches and bark. In many places around the world, the balsam fir is prized for its powerful analgesic, antiseptic and healing qualities - where it is used in topical application, to treat things such as burns, bruises, wounds, sore muscles and various other skin conditions. Because of its potent healing qualities, folk medicine has also relied heavily on balsam fir to treat sore and cracked nipples in breastfeeding women.

In oral application, balsam fir is known to be one of the best natural solutions for sore throat, persistent coughs and other respiratory tract conditions. Indeed, the German Commission E has approved the use of balsam fir to treat inflammation and infections of the airways, as well as to relieve rheumatic aches and pains.

Balsam fir also possesses well-documented anti-scabiotic, diaphoretic, tonic and diuretic qualities, and can be useful to treat digestive disorders such as diarrhea, though caution is advised, as it does have purgative qualities when taken in excess amounts.

In an effort to try and elucidate balsam fir’s many potent medicinal properties, Quebec researchers recently identified more than 15 active compounds in balsam fir essential oil. Many of which were shown to have powerful antibacterial properties in vitro, in particular against the bacterium Staphylococcus aureus.

PATHOLOGIES

COLD AND FLU: Balsam fir is a strong antimicrobial agent for colds and the flu. It is an excellent expectorant, decongestant and mucolytic and exerts a calming effect on the respiratory passages in cases of spastic cough. Balsam fir is also antiseptic, anti-infectious and antiviral, and comprises a high percentage of chemical compounds called monoterpenes which are recognized as powerful natural germ fighters. These same chemical compounds also play a role...
in stimulating the immune system in cases of colds and flu and in preventing dangerous infections. Finally, the soothing nature of balsam fir makes it ideal for soothing the aches and pain and relaxing aching muscles that so often accompany the cold and flu.

Cough and Respiratory Tract:

According to Ayurveda, respiratory illnesses occur mainly due to aggravated kapha energy, which causes water retention, and the build-up of phlegm and mucous deposits. This same tradition points to an increased vata dosha as being responsible for sinusitis, asthma and breathing problems. With this mind, balsam fir’s antiseptic properties can help prevent the spread of harmful microorganisms, which are among the primary reasons for respiratory infections. Balsam fir also has potent antitussive properties, and so serves as an effective cough suppressant, and can also act as an anti-inflammatory agent in the throat and bronchial tubes. Finally, as a natural expectorant agent, balsam fir loosens mucous and phlegm deposits in the lungs and respiratory tract, and cleanses the respiratory passages to help speed the recovery process.

Detoxification and Metabolism:

Some of the active constituents in balsam fir help stimulate the body to flush itself clean. Its tonic properties in fact, make it a great addition for those on cleanses and detoxes, who are looking to eliminate a few extra toxins from their system. Balsam fir also induces sweating, which aids in flushing additional toxins and other cellular debris from the body, as well as assists the liver, thus helping to stimulate and support the cleaning of numerous organ systems. Further, balsam fir acts as a general stimulant for the body, bolstering metabolism and increasing everything from our digestion to our heart rate, and our overall energy levels.

Concomitant Products

Atlas cedarwood, basil, black spruce, black pepper, frankincense, bergamot, thyme, peppermint, rosemary and ginger all combine extremely well with balsam fir. It may also be used as an adjuvant along with conventional or alternative approaches to the treatment of cough and cold and respiratory ailments.