

Rubia cordifolia Linn.



Family: Sapindaceae

Common names: Soapnut tree of North India

Local name: Reetha (Joshimath), Reetha (Hindi)

Ayurvedic name: Arishtak, Phenil

Plant profile:

The plant is a very handsome deciduous tree, up to 18 m or more in height and about 1-8 m in girth. The bark is dark greenish or grey and fairly smooth. The leaves are alternate, parapinnate, 30-50 cm long and the leaflets are in 5-10 pairs, glabrous lanceolate and acuminate. The flowers are small, polygamous and mostly bisexual in terminal thyrses or in compound, cymose panicles. The fruit is globose, fleshy and saponaceous. The seeds are enclosed in a black, smooth and hard pericarp. This tree is found in the Himalayas from Himachal Pradesh eastwards and in Assam ascending to an altitude of 1500 m. Flowering takes place in May-June and fruiting in October-January.

Medicinal uses:

- **Part used:** Fruits
- **Active principles:** Fresh fruits are reported to yield 13.8%, whereas old nuts gave 7.2% saponin. Fruit shell contains saponin and mukorosside.
- **Disease cured and dosage:**
 - **Ethnomedicinal:** The fruits are regarded as expectorant and are useful in salivation, chlorosis and epilepsy.
 - **Ethnoveterinary:** Data not sufficient
- **Ayurveda:** Arishtakadi churna, Prescribed dose: churna 3-6 g
- **Ayurvedic properties and actions:**
 - Guna (qualities): Laghu (light), tikshna (sharp)
 - Rasa (taste): Tikta (bitter), katu (pungent)
 - Vipaka (post digestive taste): Katu (pungent)
 - Virya (potency): Ushna (hot)
 - Prabhava (effect): Vaman (emesis)
- **Therapeutic description:**
 - Systemic effects: Alleviates vata, pitta, kapha but it is especially effective for vataj-kafaj diseases.
 - Nervous system: The seeds are hallucinogenic.
 - Respiratory system: Treats cough and dyspnoea.
 - Digestive system: It is used to cure dyspepsia, abdominal colic, digestive upsets, flatulence and worms-infestation.
 - Blood vascular system: It is used in the treatment of gout and other inflammatory disorders.
 - Urino-genital system: Suppositories are used for amenorrhoea and at the time of childbirth.
 - Skin: Cures leprosy and other skin diseases.

- **Drug preparation:** To convert the plant into a drug, the fruits are washed, dried and crushed to convert in to churna.
 - The powder must be stored in moisture free airtight containers.
 - It has a shelf life of one year.
 - It is externally used as poultice, liniment, lotion and in baths. It can also be ingested or inhaled.