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Traditional uses of Mimosa hostilis: where and what it is used for

Indigenous and rural communities use [Mimosa tenuiflora](#) in traditional medicine recipes, as an agroforestry ally and for rituals.

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Mimosa hostilis has earned a very special place in the communities of the American continent. Its uses are as versatile as the places where it grows and the names it has been given. Documented traditional uses range from relief of skin burns¹ and stomach ailments², use as fuel³, and even as part of religious rituals⁴.

This tree grows in southeast Mexico, Central America, and northeast Brazil⁵, where the most popular traditional use of Mimosa hostilis in indigenous and rural communities is to heal the skin and treat inflammation or infection⁶.

However, treating skin damage is not the only use communities have made of it. In Mexico, Mimosa hostilis has different medicinal uses, while the plant's wood is used to build fences or as firewood or charcoal.

In Central America its use is mostly agroforestry, that is, it is incorporated into cultivation methods to obtain fuel (firewood or charcoal), construction materials, provide shade and fodder for animals⁷.

Meanwhile, in North-eastern Brazil its use is more associated with religious rites. However, there are communities that also use it as fuel.

The potential of Mimosa hostilis is wide and these uses are a sample of the potential of this wonderful plant, which is also known as jurema, tepezcohuite or Mimosa tenuiflora.

Below, we will tell you more about the traditional uses that the communities give it according to the region:

Where and what is the Mimosa hostilis used?

Mimosa hostilis can be found in southern Mexico, in the central region of the state of Chiapas, in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the state of Oaxaca⁸, and in the Yucatan Peninsula⁹. Its presence extends to Central America and as far as Brazil.

MEXICO

In Mexico, the use of tepezcohuite (the name given to Mimosa hostilis) became popular in the 1980s although its healing properties had been included in traditional recipes for much longer. It was a series of catastrophes - an explosion and a volcanic eruption - during those years that forced victims to use the effectiveness of Mimosa hostilis to treat wounds and burns¹⁰.



Here are the uses by state:

Chiapas

- To build crop protection fences or paddocks¹¹
- To obtain wood or charcoal¹²

- To heal burns¹³
- To wash superficial wounds on the skin¹⁴
- To treat skin conditions, such as blemishes, fungus, wrinkles¹⁵ and pimples¹
- To cure mouth, gum or palate abrasions¹⁷
- To treat gastrointestinal problems¹⁸

Oaxaca

- To heal wounds¹⁹
- To heal burns²⁰
- To fight against hair loss²¹
- To prevent premature skin aging²²
- To reduce warts and stretch marks²³
- To treat vaginal itching and inflammation²⁴ ²⁵

Yucatan

- To accelerate wound and burn healing and ease pain²⁶
- To wash wounds and pimples²⁷
- To wash wounds in domestic animals²⁸

Central America

In Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, agroforestry use is the most predominant²⁹. Mimosa hostilis is known in Honduras and El Salvador as black carbon³⁰ because its wood is used as fuel. In fact, in eastern El Salvador, in the rural area of the municipality of Santa Clara, this plant is preferred over other species for firewood because it is the most abundant and produces the most charcoal³¹.

Agroforestry uses in Central America

- To obtain firewood³²
- To produce building materials³³
- Animal fodder³⁴
- To provide shade for livestock³⁵

In El Salvador, *Mimosa hostilis* also has the following uses:

- To treat peptic ulcers³⁶
- To treat dental problems³⁷

Brazil: beyond religious use

In Brazil, Mimosa hostilis is known as jurema or jurema preta and is used by indigenous groups in the northeast of the country and by some Afro-Brazilian communities³⁸.

Many indigenous groups in the semi-arid region of Pernambuco in northeastern Brazil consider Mimosa hostilis a sacred plant and deep respect is held for it³⁹. The jurema has a sacred conception⁴⁰; its use in indigenous groups' rituals is a way of linking tradition and ethnic identity, according to the study The Use of Medicinal Plants by the Cultural Descendants of African People in Brazil⁴¹.



Despite the popularity of the religious use of the jurema, it is not the only one in Brazil.

In the rural communities of Itaporanga, Lagoa and Sao Mamede, also in northeastern Brazil, Mimosa hostilis is used mostly as fuel and tool for construction⁴², and is even used to make partitions⁴³.

According to the study Traditional knowledge and use of Mimosa tenuiflora (Wild.) Poir. (jurema-preta) in the semi-arid region from northeastern Brazil other uses of jurema that were identified in these communities were as a rain indicator, for shade of farm animals, and for washing underwear⁴⁴. The study does not detail how these uses are

carried out.

Traditional recipes with *Mimosa hostilis*

Are you interested in how to use it? We made a documentary review of the traditional recipes, here we explain some of them:

To cure wounds and burns

In the Zoque jungle of Chiapas, the indigenous country communities of the municipalities of Cintalapa and Ocozocoautla boil the stem or bark of the *Mimosa hostilis* for 10 to 15 minutes⁴⁵ and apply it as baths or poultices (thick, moist pastes that are placed on the affected body part)⁴⁶.

In Oaxaca, in the municipalities of San Lorenzo Texmelucan, Santa Cruz Zenzontepec and Sola de Vega, the bark of the *Mimosa hostilis* is boiled. Then, with the warm infusion, the wounds or grains are washed 3 or 4 times a day until the affected area heals⁴⁷.

To cure burns, in those same communities of Oaxaca, the bark of the tree is boiled until it evaporates and only a part of the used water remains. This infusion is applied to the burned area. Roasted and ground bark can also be applied⁴⁸.

In the Yucatan Peninsula, the Mayans apply the bark powder of *Mimosa Hostilis* to wounds (especially burns) to soothe pain and speed healing⁴⁹.





To combat skin pimples

In Ocozocoautla, Chiapas, a piece of about 10 centimeters of the bark of *Mimosa hostilis* and a piece of the same size of copalchi (*Croton glabellus*), another medicinal plant, are used. Both pieces are prepared in half a liter of water and the infusion is applied in a compress with a canvas on the affected part, leaving it for about 10 to 15 minutes⁵⁰.

In San Lorenzo Texmelucan, Santa Cruz Zenzontepec and Sola de Vega, Oaxaca, the same steps are followed as for treating wounds⁵¹.

Intimate use for women

In the communities of San Lorenzo Texmelucan, Santa Cruz Zenzontepec and Sola de Vega, in Oaxaca, the bark of the *Mimosa hostilis* is boiled and external washings are given⁵² to attend to the "discomforts of women", as they call the itching of the vulva and vaginal itching.

The versatility of *Mimosa hostilis* is not only because of the different uses that communities make of it, but also because of how different parts of the plant are used.

Did you know that, in addition to these uses, you can use *Mimosa hostilis* to dye textiles or tan leather?

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