



Global  
Facilitation  
Unit  
for Underutilized  
Species

# HENNA

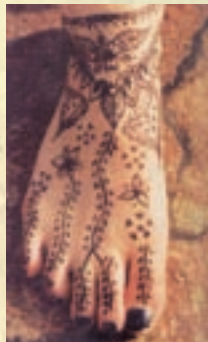
(*Lawsonia inermis*)

enabling deployment of underutilized species

## **What is Henna** and where does it come from?

**Henna is a tall shrub or small tree native to tropical and subtropical regions of Africa, Asia, and Australia. It is found in arid and semi-arid zones. From its leaves a red-orange dye agent is extracted. This agent has an affinity for bonding with proteins, and thus is used to dye human body parts (skin, hair, fingernails), as well as leather, silk and wool. Henna is commercially cultivated in Western India, Pakistan, Morocco, Yemen, Iran, Sudan and Libya. Presently the Pali district of Rajasthan is the most heavily cultivated henna production area in India, with over 100 henna processors operating in Sojat City alone.**

*Though Henna has been used for body art and hair dye since the Bronze Age, it has had a recent renaissance in body art due to improvements in its cultivation, processing, and to the diasporas of people from traditional Henna areas who have been introducing the plant and its applications to new regions.*



## PROPERTIES

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Henna has many traditional and commercial uses, the most common being as a dye for hair, skin and fingernails, a dye and preservative for leather and cloth, and as an anti-fungal.

### ❖❖❖ **Cosmetics**

Henna is most commonly used as a hair dye and for body art. Henna blossoms are so fragrant they have been used in perfumes since since 1500 Bc. According to legend they were the Prophet Mohammed's favorite scent.

#### *How it is used for body art*

*The Henna powder is mixed with lemon juice, strong tea, or other mildly acidic liquids. Essential oils with high levels of "terps", monoterpene alcohols such as tea tree, eucalyptus or lavender will improve skin stain characteristics. The henna mix must rest for 6 to 12 hours so the leaf cellulose is dissolved, making the henna dyeing agent (lawsone) available to stain the skin. This is mixed to a toothpaste consistency and applied with a one of many traditional tools, including resist techniques, shading techniques, and thicker paste techniques, or the modern cellowrap cone.*

### ❖❖❖ **Health**

Henna was listed in ancient Syrian and Egyptian medical texts as a medicinal herb. It will repel some insect pests and mildew. The United States Food and Drug Administration has not approved henna for direct application to the skin. It is unconditionally approved as a hair dye, and can only be imported for that purpose.

### ❖❖❖ **Other Uses**

In Morocco, wool is dyed and ornamented with henna, as are drumheads and other leather goods.



## **GROWING**

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Henna will only grow where temperatures stay above 11 degrees Celsius. It will tolerate extreme heat and long droughts. It grows wild near desert oasis, and in semi-arid regions. It thrives in alluvial soils. In slightly less than ideal conditions, it is cultivated for hair quality henna. In cooler, moister conditions it is cultivated as a flowering hedgerow shrub. The plant can be propagated by rooting the cuttings or sowing the seeds.

## **PROCESSING**

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Commercially available henna powder is made by drying the henna leaves and milling them to powder, then the powder is sifted.







## **Contribution to rural livelihood and preservation of cultural heritage**

Henna is classified as a Non Timber Forest Product. In Pakistan, for example, 80% of forest dwellers are dependant on NTFPs in one way or another. They rely on their indigenous knowledge for collection, processing, packing, drying, marketing and consumption of various non timber forest products including henna. One aspect regarding the use and the production of henna not to be disregarded pertains to the rich cultural heritage that is inherent in the art of henna body art.

**The exhibits on show** are just few of many commercial products made from Henna:

Alrehab royal henna natural powder  
Natural henna powders

SOME PRODUCERS / RETAILERS / DISTRIBUTORS

❖ Al-Rehab Perfumes - [www.alrehab.com](http://www.alrehab.com)

❖ Planta Medica srl - [www.plantamedica.it](http://www.plantamedica.it)



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