

Carambola - Star Fruit (*Averrhoa carambola* L.)

My primary interest in distilling star fruit was based on its ancient use as a tan for leather. The highly astringent unripe fruit and fruit from the 'sour' trees were used to turn raw hide into soft leather and provided a vegetable alternative to other less savory tanning methods like brains and urine. It seemed logical that anything that can turn hard rawhide into soft leather must have beneficial properties for the skin, especially skin damaged by exposure to sun and/or wind.

It is also a traditional remedy for eczema, helping to heal the rough patches of skin and reduce itching. Chinese medicine considers Starfruit a cooling medicine that increases saliva and quenches thirst. In Ayurvedic medicine it is used to break a fever, stop diarrhea and vomiting, heal hemorrhoids and as a diuretic.

In Brazil the seeds are used as a stimulant in certain ritualistic practices, medicinally they are used post-partum to balance the hormones, increase milk flow and bring on menstruation.

Starfruit trees produce a wide variety of fruit flavours from extremely sour, astringent fruit very high in oxalic acid and tannins to sweet fruit that has little astringency. When ripe starfruit develop a slight brown line along the ridges of the 5 points and it is generally not advised to eat fruit that is still green as the high levels of calcium oxalate in unripe fruit is irritating to the kidneys. In many places they say never pick starfruit from the tree, the best fruit falls to the ground when it's ready to eat.

Smell and Taste: aroma is fruity, sweet and candy-like but with plenty of low notes to balance the scent. Taste is slightly sweet, fruity and mild with a slight hint of astringency but no obvious oxalic acid flavour.

Therapeutics: Starfruit hydrosol is excellent for mature skin and those who spend a lot of time outdoors. Use daily to help restore elasticity and reduce damage caused by sun and wind. Where sun exposure is the issue try blending Starfruit with Frankincense or Turmeric, for rosacea, couperose or general redness blend with Cucumber or Yarrow.

Use as a mouthwash to tone the gums and to heal mouth ulcers, also good after dental work. Starfruit makes a good first-aid compress for wounds by reducing swelling and bleeding. For hemorrhoids compress the area for 15 minute sessions and use as a wash after bowel movements.

To break a fever, add 60ml (2 ozs) hydrosol to 375ml (1 ½ cups) lukewarm water and compress the forehead, back of the neck, and chest with the blend. Also bathe the arms and legs with a washcloth dipped in the hydrosol water.

Internally Starfruit makes an excellent aperitif. Add 30ml (1 oz) to 500ml (2 cups) water and serve in liqueur glasses before a meal (add a little honey if you want to make this more liqueur-like). Starfruit will stimulate saliva and the production of enzymes ensuring good digestion even after a heavy meal. It can also be used to calm an upset stomach. For vomiting or diarrhea take 1 teaspoon of hydrosol every 15-20 minutes followed by sips of room temperature water. Repeat until system clears.

Also excellent in cooking, I have used Starfruit in Asian-style soups and sauces, in fish dishes, salad dressings and added to desserts from apple pie to rice pudding.

Energetics: this fruit is nature's Pentagram, the perfect 5-pointed star. Stars are magical symbols in most cultures and they carry the mystery of the heavens allowing us mere mortals the chance to connect with stellar origins and power. The pentagram is used as a protective symbol, like the sheriff's badge, protecting individuals as well as property, buildings etc.

The leaves of this Carambola are sensitive to the touch and picking the fruit one watches the leaves fold and open, fold and open keeping just out of contact. The hydrosol can be used to make us less emotionally sensitive, better able to cope with grief, distress or stress, something we all need in these complex times.