

Herbal Medicine from Africa

Possibly the most misunderstood of all traditional medicines, African herbal medicine is thought by most Westerners as the collective term for various medical "voodoo" and those who practice it are called witch doctors or "voodoo" doctors. This manner of thinking regarding African herbal medicine is merely a shallow attempt at understanding the true depths of African sacred realities in respect to religion, philosophy, and medicine. In fact, African herbal medicine has been around for thousands of years and is intermittently connected with spirituality and religion. It has little to do with witch doctor myths and much more to do with the genuine practice.

The Origins of African Herbal Medicine

African herbal medicine is commonly called Yorubic medicine on the African continent. It was started from a religious text, called Ifa Corpus. According to tradition, the Ifa Corpus was revealed by the mystic prophet, Orunmila, around 4,000 years ago in the ancient city of Ile-Ife, now known as Yorubaland. The last 400 years saw individuals in the Caribbean and South America practice the Yorubic healing system as a token of their past when the first wave of African slaves arrived in the Americas.

The prophet Orunmila taught his people about the customs of divination, prayer, dance, symbolic gestures, personal, and communal elevation. He also advised them on spiritual baths, meditation, and herbal medicine in particular. As a matter of fact, the Ifa Corpus is known as the foundation of the art of divine herbology.

Much like other ancient systems of medicine, Yorubic or African herbal medicine thrives in the ideal of conditioning the body in its entirety so that disease will not attack it. According to historical records, the Yoruba people are in fact an East African tribe who moved from the mid-Nile river to the mid-Niger area. In his demonstration, Olumide J. Lucue said that "the Yoruba, during antiquity, lived in ancient Egypt before migrating to the Atlantic coast."

With Egypt at its roots, it is therefore inevitable that African herbal medicine became associated with magic. Amulets and charms were more common than pills as preventions or curatives of diseases. Priests, who were from the earliest days the forefathers of science and medicine, considered diseases as possession by evil demons and could be treated using incantations along with extracts from the roots of certain plants. The psychosomatic method of healing disorders used primarily by psychiatrists today is based loosely on this ancient custom.

Ewe: The Herbal Component

In African herbal medicine, ewe is the Yoruba term for herbs. Thought to contain spiritual powers, ewes are picked for medicinal and spiritual purposes. Herbalists who practiced African herbal medicine employed it for medicines, baths, and religious artifacts. According to African herbal medicine, ewes are for the "healing of nations" and their use have become prevalent in the New World. Today, many health food stores offer ewes in powder, leaf, and capsule form.