



ALBIZIA JULIBRISSIN

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Albizia Julibrissin is a prolific subtropical tree covered in neon pink puffs when blooming. The tree is unmistakable. It looms otherworldly, like something out of a Dr Seuss story or a child's imagination of a Candy Land-esque landscape where cotton candy bursts forth from each tree. The scent of albizia flowers complement this visual feast impeccably, with their nectarous perfume permeating the landscape. Albizia's verdant, fern like leaves have a life of their own, closing downward each night, evoking albizia's Japanese name, 'Sleeping Tree' [3]. Time spent with this tree produces a dreamy, sweet sensation luring one from the depths of melancholy.

Albizia is native to Asia, and was brought to the United States in 1745. Growing up to 50 feet, the tree takes root in deciduous forests, roadsides, and watersheds, usually below 3,000 feet. In the Southern U.S. and Hawaii it is considered invasive and great efforts are used to staunch its growth and spread [10]. This invasive quality of albizia matches well the obtrusive nature of the symptoms that it so auspiciously treats.

In China, albizia is called the Tree of Happiness, referring not only to its jubilant presence, but also its therapeutic uses; albizia is a tonic for depression, anxiety, grief and insomnia. The flowers and bark are used and, according to Michael Tierra, "the bark is thought to 'anchor' the spirit, while the flowers 'lighten' it" [12]. Used together the flower and bark are a balanced remedy for mood stabilization [2]. Energetically, albizia is cooling, moistening, and slightly relaxing, with a sweet taste [4].

As a hospice nurse, depression, anxiety, grief and insomnia are particularly significant in the population I serve, but I believe all humans can relate to these pervasive symptoms. Having a myriad of etiologies, from overt or disenfranchised loss, disparities in socio-economic and environmental factors, discrimination and marginalization, and trans-generational epigenetic inheritance, these symptoms will undoubtedly play a roll at some point in ones life. It was reported that in 2015 forty million Americans took anxiolytics, antidepressants and antipsychotics, and this number has only increased with each passing year [1]. These are medications directed precisely at palliating the symptoms which albizia so gently soothes. Unlike albizia though, these medications have a deluge of side effects and adverse reactions.

The pharmacotherapeutics of anxiolytic, antidepressant, and antipsychotic drugs are extensive and vastly beyond the aims of this discussion, but in simplest terms, they all target processing of one or more of the neurotransmitters norepinephrine, epinephrine, serotonin, GABA and dopamine within the central nervous system [5], [6]. Some side effects of these pharmaceuticals include sedation, headache, dry mouth, blurred vision, urinary incontinence, weight gain, weight loss, hypotension, hypertension, GI

distress, cardiotoxicity, seizures, sexual dysfunction, circulatory collapse, tolerance and physical dependency [5]. Withdrawing from some of these medications is life threatening, may require hospitalization, and withdrawal symptoms alone include paranoia, delirium, panic, hypertension, and status epilepticus [5].

Michael Tierra notes, “albizia is thought to enhance all aspects of neurotransmitter secretion and regulation” [12]. An article in the *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* concurs, and reports that albizia is an effective treatment for insomnia due to its ability to modulate GABA and 5-HT_{2c} receptors which in turn affect serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine [3]. *Life Sciences* published an article noting the anxiety relieving effects of albizia through its interaction with serotonin [8]. And the journal, *Pharmacology, Biochemistry and Behavior* also links albizia to serotonin in relation to its antidepressant effects through the 5-HT_{1A} receptor system [7]. Furthermore, albizia contains bioactive compounds such as antioxidants, saponins, alkaloids, flavonoids and phenolic compounds, each adding to albizia’s pharmacological uses [9]. All of these findings are compelling, and yet albizia has no known side effects and can be taken long term as a nervine tonic for most people. Pregnancy is the only exception to this and albizia is contraindicated for the entirety of pregnancy and lactation.

Depression, anxiety, grief and insomnia are complex and painful. At times, immediate medical attention is needed to address these symptoms and psychiatric medications are truly a life saver. Herbal medicine is not a panacea, but it can, at times, aide in nudging one back towards wholeness. Bessel A. van der Kolk, a psychiatrist dedicated to understanding trauma and its myriad manifestations states, “Psychiatric medications have a serious downside, as they may deflect attention from dealing with the underlying issues” [13]. Albizia, on the other hand, allows a person to rest and relax into their physical and emotional sensations, thereby allowing a glimpse into “the underlying issues.” This is one step towards not ‘stuffing’ ones emotions, but rather allowing them to unfold. Albizia brings symptomatic relief as well as long term health and nourishment to the nervous system allowing greater resilience in the future.

Grief, it is important to note, may manifest in depression, anxiety and insomnia, but encompasses so much more. Alan Wolfelt has explained, “essentially, grief is what we think and feel inside after a loss. Not just sadness, it often includes feelings of shock, denial, disorganization, confusion, anger, fear and panic. It can include regret AND relief, physical pain and social discomfort, disjointed thinking and spiritual despair. It is physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual” [14]. Clearly, grief is individual and varying, so how do we learn to live through grief? Most traditional cultures have rituals and ceremonies to honor loss and the way it binds us together, though in modern times it may require an individual to dig deep into their heritage to unearth these rites. Harvard researchers, Norton and Gino, found that “rituals help people overcome grief by counteracting the turbulence and chaos that follows loss” [11]. Albizia may be a sweet addition to such ritual. As the Japanese tea ceremony brings harmony

and communion to those partaking, so too may regular, intentional use of an albizia preparation bring not only ritual to ones day, but nourishment to ones nervous system.

Albizia is used in many traditional healing modalities. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) considers it a Shen tonic, transferring seamlessly into its uses in western herbal medicine [2]. TCM also uses the bark externally to assist in the healing of bruises, ulcers, abscesses, and fractures [12]. Ayurvedic medicine uses another albizia, *albizia lubek*, to treat allergies, do to its ability to “prevent mast cell degeneration” [12]. In other cultures, albizia is used in cosmetics, as a love charm, as food, and as an adornment [9].

Albizia Julibrissin is a wonderful addition to an herbal medicine repertoire. Depression, anxiety, insomnia and grief will inevitably make an appearance in ones life; this sweet tonic will be an ally through these difficult times, engendering a calm unfolding and cultivating greater emotional resilience

Botanical Name

Albizia Julibrissin

Family

Fabeacea

Common Names

Persian Silk Tree

Mimosa Tree

Sleeping Tree

Tree of Happiness

**Native Region**

Asia, from Iran to Japan

Geographic Distribution

Temperate areas worldwide; considered highly invasive in some areas.

Botanical Description

Fast growing tree, reaching up to 50' in height. The tree has smooth, light brown bark, fern like leaves, pink, pom-pom like flowers producing 3-7" long legume pods [10]. The tree blooms from July to August, and the fruits are produced and ripen from September to November [10].

Parts Used

Flowers and Bark

Harvesting and Processing

The bark is harvested in spring or summer and the flowers are harvested as they open. Both the flowers and bark can be used fresh or dried.

Preparations

The bark and flowers can be used fresh or dried in tincture. The bark can also be used fresh or dried in tea, though the flowers are best used fresh in tea.

Energetics

Cooling, moistening, slightly relaxing [4].

Taste

The flowers are very sweet and the bark is sweet, slightly astringent, and woody.

Therapeutic uses

The flowers and bark are tonics for depression, anxiety, insomnia, and grief. The bark and/or a gummy resin from the tree is useful externally for skin issues, fractures and sprains.

Safety and Contra-Indications

Not to be used during pregnancy or when breast feeding, otherwise, considered safe for long term use.

Herbal Pairs

Albizia pairs well with hawthorn, rose, motherwort, tulsi and passionflower.

Dosing Guidelines

Freshly dried flowers (1:2, 50% alcohol); dried bark (1:5, 50% alcohol) 10 drops to 5ml (1 tsp.) 1 to 4 times daily [4].

Tea: 1-2 tsp. dried bark, 10 oz. water, decoct 15 minutes, steep 1/2 hour, take 4 oz TID [4].

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