Cat's Claw, also commonly called Uña de Gato, is a breakthrough herbal medicine that is reported to be beneficial to the treatment of cancer, digestion disorders, Crohn's disease, arthritis, diabetes, chronic fatigue syndrome, bursitis, rheumatism, genital herpes and herpes zoster, allergies, ulcers, systemic candidiasis, pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), along with numerous other bowel and intestinal disorders. It also is noted to have positive effect on immune system problems, including those infected with the HIV virus. This wonder drug seems to have surpassed the capabilities of other sought after natural medicinal products such as golden seal, astragalus, Siberian Ginseng, maitake, and shark cartilage. (Steinberg 1994)

Cat's Claw is a woody vine that grows over 100 feet in length that is indigenous to the Amazon Rainforest and other tropical areas of South and Central America including Peru, Columbia, Ecuador, Guyana, Trinidad, Venezuela, Suriname, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Panama. (www.raintree.com/catclaw.htm). Cat's Claw is from two closely related species. Uncaria tomentosa and Uncaria guianensis and both are used interchangeably by the locals. The difference between the two species is that U. tomentosa has smaller yellowish-white flowers and is found in elevations of 700 to 2500 meters while, U. guainensis has thorns that are more curved and reddish-orange flowers and is found at lower elevations. (Moss 1995 and www.rain-tree.com/catclaw.htm).

According to legend, Cat's Claw was discovered by a despaired Peruvian hunter who was having difficulty getting game for his family. Then one day, he observed a jaguar that was clawing at a vine and also drinking the water that was seeping from it. Immediately after the jaguar finished drinking, he made a successful kill. The hunter decided to follow the lead of the jaguar and drank some of the water from the vine. Immediately, the hunter felt rejuvenated. The next day, the hunter woke up full of newfound strength. He finally made a successful hunting excursion and was able to bring home much needed food for his family.

In the mid 1960's, an European teacher, Arturo Brell, and U.S. professor Eugene Whitworth, were the
first to document the tribal uses of this plant. They also took plant samples and performed some screening for the active components (www.rain-tree.com/catclaw.htm). However, they did not market their discovery. Shortly afterwards, Cat's claw was rediscovered by Claus Keplinger, an Austrian scientist of Innsbruck University. (Moss 1995)

Since then, a number of significant reports have been issued on the remarkable number of potential uses of this herb. One of the headlines suggested Cat's Claw's as a possible anti-AIDS drug. Dr. Keplinger has found that the bark contains various oxindole alkaloids and alloisopteropodine (the supposed isomer A), the substance purportedly effective as an anti-AIDS drug. In addition, Italian scientist have found quinovic acid glycosides in the bark, which also possess antiviral activity (Moss 1995). European research has shown that Uña de Gato activates the immune system by increasing the amount of white blood cell activity (www.rain-tree.com/catclaw.htm). In Peru, there have been reported 20 instances where AIDS patients showed beneficial effects on their immune system, and in 30 days the lymphatic glands showed improvement.

It has also been observed that people who have taken Cat's Claw in combination with conventional chemotherapy and radiation treatments have reported fewer side effects, such as hair loss, weight loss, nausea, secondary infections and skin problems (www.rain-tree.com/catclaw.htm). So far, there have been no noticeable side effects from high dosages of Cat's Claw. However, it is recommended that it not be taken by people who are using antiulcer medications, or by transplant patients, or those injected with foreign proteins as part of their normal therapy as it appears to increase the effectiveness of the immune system. *Uncaria tomentosa* also can cause uterine contractions so it should not be taken by pregnant women or women trying to become pregnant (www.catclaw.com/text/Piu/thirdparty/nahealth.htm).

Cat's claw is widely available in tea, tablet, capsule, and extract forms made from both the inner bark and root of the vine. For 1000 mg a day, it cost between $20 to $25 for a month's supply.

There are some companies who have gained special permits to harvest the root of Cat's Claw and claiming that it is more potent than portions obtained from the vine, This is based on an European study where the root was used in research. However, the study was performed using only the bark on the root and not using the whole ground root. The percentage of root bark to root is quite small, thus alkaloid contents are not much different between whole root products and quality inner bark products. The practice of harvesting the root has a negative effect on the ecological security of the plant population (www.rain-tree.com/ccfaq.htm).

With further research, Cat's Claw could show to be the cure all or at least a helper for many of today's medical mysteries, such as cancer and AIDS, to mention a few. Just think of all of the other possible miracle drugs the Peruvian rain forest and other rain forests may hold. Such potential drug plants may eventually be lost forever with the continuance of rainforest clear cuttings.

References


Steinberg, Phillip N. 1996. Amazon Medicine: A vine from the rain forest that's loaded with healing chemicals. Natural Health (www.catslaw.com/text/Piu/thirdparty/nahealth.htm).


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