HENNA

Lawsonia inermis  
[law-SOH-nee-uh IN-er-mis]

Family: Lythraceae

Names: Egyptian privet, al-herna, mignonette tree, Henne, Al-Khanna, Al-henna, Jamaica Mignonette, Mehndi, Mendee, Smooth Lawsonia, Manjuati; Madayantika (Sanskrit)

Description: small shrub to 10 feet with oblong or elliptical brownish-green leaves that resemble those of the privet. In summer, heavily perfumed white or red flowers bloom in broad, flattish clusters, followed by round berries.

Cultivation: Native to the Middle East, North Africa, and the Indian subcontinent, henna grows in sunny positions and is widely cultivated. Prefers well-drained, sandy soil in sun, minimum 50F. Propagate by seed in spring, or by softwood cuttings in spring, or by hardwood cuttings in winter. Remove dead wood and trim to shape in late spring. The leaves and young leafy shoots are picked during the growing season and dried for use in powders. Flowers are gathered in early morning and distilled for oil. The Henna plant is normally grown in "Desert" conditions and it is best to try to imitate as best you can the conditions of their native environment. Water them amply roughly every 4-6 days letting the plant's soil dry out between waterings. Fertilize the plant once every three weeks or so. Keep temperatures above 50 degrees or the plants will lose their leaves.

History: Henna has been in use for centuries in various parts of world. Even as far back as 5000 years ago. Henna was used for coloring the hair and nails of Mummies. In the Near East it is planted as a wind break for vineyards and melon plantations for it forms a bushy leafy plant. The flowering, twiggy stems were woven into chaplets by Egyptian maidens and to this day, sprays of blossom are sold in the streets of Cairo and Damascus with the cry “oh odor of Paradise: of flowers of henna.” Mohammed is said to have dyed his beard with henna and Mohammedan women use it to color their hair with a reddish tint or mixed with indigo (‘reng’), it imparts a fine blue-black gloss to beard and hair and was made into a paste to apply to the body especially among certain orthodox Muslim and Hindu women for the bride’s hands and feet on the eve of her wedding. Henna leaves were used by the people of ancient civilizations to dye the manes and tails of their horses. The Egyptians are said to have prepared both an oil and an ointment from the flowers for making the limbs supple. Sleeping on a pillow stuffed with henna flowers is considered to have a soporific effect on patients suffering from sleeplessness.
**Constituents:** Contains coumarins, naphthaquinones (including lawson), flavonoids, sterols, and tannins. There has been found in it a brown substance of a resinoid fracture, having the chemical properties which characterize the tannins, and therefore named hemnotannic acid.

**Properties:** Leaves are astringent, prevent hemorrhaging. It is regarded as an alterative and nerve tonic in Ayurvedic medicine; bactericide, bechic, deodorant, emmenagogue, sedative, venereal

**Medicinal Uses:** Used mainly within Ayurvedic and Unani medicine. The fruits have been thought to stimulate the menstrual function. In powdered form, the leaves have been utilized both internally and externally to treat various skin diseases, including leprosy, fungal infections, acne and boils. In Arabic medicine the powder was employed in the treatment of jaundice, though there it is unlikely the henna benefited the patient at all. In India the leaves were made into an astringent gargle. An infusion or decoction of the leaves is used for diarrhea and dysentery.

Extracts of henna leaves have been shown to act in a manner similar to ergot with respect to inducing uterine contractions. So it’s possible that extracts of the plant could induce menstruation and be effective emmenagogues. The topical application of two chemical components of this shrub, lawson and dihydroxyacetone, has been reported ultraviolet light for people with chlorpromazine-induced light sensitivity. Experimentally, a water extract of the leaves inhibited gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria. Antitumor activity in experiments with mice tends to support folkloric uses of henna as an anticancer agent.

For abdominal pain: Grind all the following into a paste: the roots of *Lawsomia incermis*, the roots of *Ranga* (Tribal), the roots of *Gandha* (Tribal), the roots of *Cocos miciferate*, the tuber of *Moimordia dioica*, the exocarp fruit of *Ipomoea digitata*. Prepare tablets with this paste. Take one tablet orally each time twice daily for 15 days.

For jaundice: Grind the roots of *Lawsonia incermis* (5g) with seeds of *Piper nigrum* (21umber) into a paste. Take this paste orally as single dose daily for 21 days with rice washed water (or) Grind the roots of *Lawsomia incermis* into a paste. Take 10ml of this paste orally each time twice daily for a week with rice washed water (or) Grind the roots of *Lawsonia incermis* with sun-dried rice into a paste. Take 10ml of this paste orally each time twice daily in empty stomach in morning and after food at night for 3 to 4 days (or) collect the roots of *Lawsonia incermis* growing towards east on any Saturdays and Sunday in early morning before washing the face. Grind these roots into a paste. Take 10ml of this paste orally each time twice daily for a week with rice washed water. (or) rub the roots of *Lawsonia incermis* on a carry stone and collect the suspension. Take 10ml of this suspension orally each time once daily for a week in empty stomach.

For skin diseases: Grind the leaves of *Lawsonia incermis* with the rhizome of *Curcuma longa* into a paste. Apply or smear this paste on infected area once daily for 3 to 4 days.

**Cosmetic Uses:** Henna has been known for centuries for its superb hair conditioning, coloring properties, gives natural strength, shine and luster to hair. It is a pure natural and herbal product with no side effect on skin and body. It gives soothing cooling effect to body and is used as major ingredients in making many other herbal products. It acts as a cooling agent for head and body. Henna contains those natural ingredients, which are vital for hair nourishment. It is also used for body tattooing, textile dying and tanning. The principal advantage offered by henna as a modern hair color, is its eco-friendly nature and healthy for body. Henna has been in use in India and Middle East, for hundreds of years and is well known for its natural values, coloring effect and sweet pleasant fragrance. From the flowers, a sweet smelling toilet water is made,
to apply to the face after washing, and from the leaves, the most famous of all hair dyes is obtained. As it is a vegetable coloring agent, it coats the hair without penetrating it. The color can be varied and darkened by mixing it with such dye plants as indigo, Lucerne, and catechu. The best quality henna is said to come from Iran. It is used for dyeing hair, feet and hands.

Mehndi is the process of dyeing the feet and hands and is deeply ingrained in the Indian tradition. Although applied on other occasions as well, it is an integral part of the wedding ceremonies and is almost synonymous with the marriage of a woman. A special time is set aside for the application of mehndi to the hands and feet of the bride-to-be. Usually the ceremony takes place on the night before the actual wedding. The bride will be surrounded by all the female members of the household, as well as the friends, she has grown up with, and close relatives who have come to attend the wedding. The ceremony will probably last into the week hours of the morning when, finally, the women will retire for a few hours slumber only to wake up for a hectic day ahead for the wedding. The bride will usually sleep with the mehndi paste still on her hands and feet and not wash it off until the next morning. This is crucial, since the longer the paste stays on, the darker is the ultimate color. The next morning, when she does wash her hands and feet, everybody will come to admire the intricate patterns and the deep vibrant color. The darker the color the more her mother-in-law and husband are supposed to love her.

Traditionally, as long as the bride has mehndi on her hands, she will not be asked to do any household work or chores at her mother-in-laws house once she reaches there after the wedding. So, the bride has her own special interests in trying to keep the mehndi paste on as long as possible to get the darkest possible color! The basic ingredient in mehndi are the leaves of the henna plant Lawsonia Inermis. The dry leaves are crushed into a soft powder and mixed with water, lime juice, and tea to form a smooth paste. Usually the paste is prepared the night before it is to be applied. Before the application of mehndi the skin is washed thoroughly with soap and water and conditioned with either eucalyptus oil or a special mehndi oil. Then the henna paste is applied either freehand, or with some aids like a toothpick, stencil, or an improvised cone similar to that used for icing cakes. After the design has been applied, the paste is allowed to remain on the skin. Care is taken to not let it dry too much as it tends to flake off. A mixture of two parts lemon juice and one part sugar is applied at regular intervals to prevent this from happening. It is recommended that the paste be left on for at least four hours, although the longer it stays on the darker and more intense the color will be. Once the henna paste has been removed, the final design may last anywhere from two to six weeks, depending upon the quality of henna used and how often the hands and feet come in contact with soap and water.

Hair Coloring: Henna dyeing is a long, tedious process and it is rather difficult to stabilize the color except with experience. The color lasts several months and with experimentation you can achieve a rich auburn, brown or black or an interesting red. Since henna is slightly astringent, be sure to rub a light covering of safflower or corn oil on your scalp before using it. Hair must be shampooed before using henna. Wear gloves during the entire application as henna can stain hands and fingernails. Recipe: 2 cups henna powder, 1 cup warm water, 1 tsp pure vinegar. Stir henna powder and water into thick paste. Add vinegar to help release dye. Let stand for one hour. Stir the henna and vinegar in the top of a double boiler until the water in the bottom pot boils vigorously. Remove from flame and let stand for 1 hour. Heat up again quickly, and with gloved hands massage into hair. For a brown color let the hair stand in a linen towel for at least 3-4 hours. For auburn or dark hair color let the color stay in up to 6 hours. Then wash the hair. Keep rinsing until the water comes away very clear. Keep combing the hair
as you rinse. To counteract drying action gently massage oil into the scalp.

**Henna and Lemon Paste to Redden Hair:** 10 Tbsp Iranian henna, 1 Tbsp ground coffee, juice of 2 lemons, boiling water, corn oil, 1 egg yolk. Mix the henna, ground coffee and lemon juice, and add enough boiling water to make a paste. Leave to stand for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, massage some corn oil into the scalp to prevent drying. After the necessary time has elapsed, beat the egg into the henna mixture and apply the paste evenly to the hair. Depending on the natural tone of your hair and the rich auburn tint that you want, leave the paste on for 1-1 ½ hours. Shampoo in the usual way.

**Henna Nail Polish:** Make a thin paste by adding warm water to henna powder. Apply to nails with a small paintbrush. Allow dry, preferably in the sun. When thoroughly dry, rinse off in tepid water. This will give you a soft amber pink which will not chip.

**Ritual Uses:** Herbe of Jupiter, Aphrodisiac Herbe. Henna may be used today for its sensual values. The color which will be imparted to the sexual areas of the body has great magickal value, serving as ritual adornment. Such markings can have powerful ritual significance. Henna is recommended for use in the Great Rite at the most important ritual occasions. Place on forehead to relieve headache. Attracts love if worn near the heart. Protects from illness and the evil eye.

**Henna Sound Sleep Pillow:** Henna has a long magical history. It’s used in love spells, to reduce fevers and to provide deep, restful, restorative sleep. Fill a dream pillow with powdered henna to promote a sound night’s sleep.

**Sleep Powder:** Sift henna powder and sandalwood powder together until the mix is fine and smooth. Sprinkle onto lit charcoal and fumigate the bedroom before sleep. If the powder is very fine, try sprinkling onto your sheets instead of or in addition to burnish.

**Headache Spells:** Cover fresh henna blossoms with boiling water. Let the infusion cool, strain it and make a compress. Crush fresh blossoms and add them to white vinegar. Use this as a compress.

**References:**
- The Element Encyclopedia of 5000 Spells, Judika Illes, Harper Collins, 2004

**Resources:**
- Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com

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