

Jerusalem Oak ^[1]

Jerusalem Oak

by A. J. Bullard, 2006

Jerusalem oak (*Chenopodium ambrosioides* ^[2]) is a weedy perennial plant found throughout North Carolina and the



Chenopodium ambrosioides, commonly known as Jerusalem oak, wormseed, and Mexican tea. Image courtesy of Herbal Safety (presented by University of Texas at

Austin and El Paso). United States. Those with an eastern, rural North Carolina background use the name Jerusalem oak more commonly than the names often recognized elsewhere in the United States-Spanish and Mexican tea and wormseed.

Jerusalem oak seeds and leaves had a number of important uses and were sought by various manufacturers of fragrances and medicines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This demand created a financial opportunity for many rural persons, primarily women and children from the 1800s to the 1940s, who probably would otherwise have been unable to find employment, particularly during the Great Depression ^[3] years. Gathering the dried seed and selling to local "middle men" earned from 10 to 25 cents per pound. Locals also used the seeds and leaves as a remedy for hookworm, boiling them and drinking the tea. Athlete's foot was treated by soaking the feet in such solutions.

Commercially, the oil (ascaridol) of the Jerusalem oak was used in medicines, primarily as an anthelmintic (remedy for worms) for humans and animals. The Maryland Distillery near Baltimore, dating back to the mid-1800s and the leading distiller of ascaridol as late as the mid-1900s, processed a major portion of the North Carolina harvest. In recent years substitute medications with lower production costs have emerged, and today the major modern use of this plant centers around fragrance components in creams, detergents, lotions, perfumes, and soaps.

Image Credit:

Chenopodium ambrosioides, commonly known as Jerusalem oak, wormseed, and Mexican tea. Image courtesy of Herbal Safety (presented by University of Texas at Austin and El Paso).

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From:

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