

Herbs For Healing Newsletter

The mysterious Mistletoe (*Viscum album*)

Did you kiss under the mistletoe this Christmas?

In Scandinavia mistletoe is considered a symbol of **peace** under which enemies would declare a truce, and arguing couples kiss and make up. From early times mistletoe has been one of the most

magical, mysterious and sacred plants in Europe. The mistletoe from oak trees was sacred to ancient Celtic Druids who cut it on the sixth night of the moon with a golden sickle. The plant was gathered at mid-summer and winter solstices.

Mistletoe, friend or foe...

Mistletoe blossoms from beginning of February. Some plants have female flowers and other plants have male flowers. Both are yellow and very small. Its orange scent makes them attractive to insects. In September the white berries start to ripen. They are very sticky and contain a seed.

Comparatively we see few mistletoe plants in Britain. Occasionally you see them in apple trees. However apple orchards are in decline in this country. Normandy in France has mistletoe in abundance.

Since the 1950s about 60% of old orchards in the "cider country" of Somerset, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire have disappeared. In Devon and Kent the decline has been even more dramatic: nearly 90%. No wonder we hardly see any mistletoe plants.

Mistletoe has a reputation for destroying trees on which it grows, because it is a parasitic plant. Birds which eat mistletoe seeds spread them through their droppings.

Mistletoe comes from the anglo-saxon word 'mistel' for dung and 'tan' means twig. Literally the name means 'dung on a twig'.

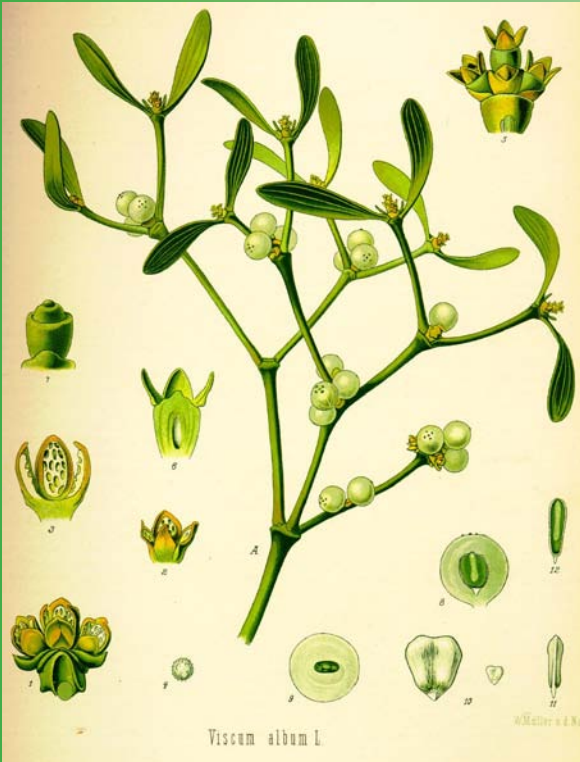


Biodiversity

Mistletoe has a positive effect on biodiversity. Apart from being a parasitic plant it provides high quality food and a habitat for many animals in forests and woodland all over the world. For example a study has found that more juniper berries sprout in areas where mistletoe is present. Mistletoe attracts berry-eating birds, which also eat juniper berries and so encourage spreading. Many birds eat mistletoe seeds and young shoots.



Mistletoe: has powerful medicinal properties



High blood pressure

One of mistletoe's medicinal uses is in the treatment of high blood pressure. The berries are toxic but the leaves and young twigs are used homoeopathically or as a cold infusion. It stimulates the metabolism and can help to ease rheumatic pain.

Assisting in cancer treatment

Mistletoe extract (Iscador et al) is a preparation used to treat different forms of cancer alongside conventional cancer treatment. Research shows that patients using mistletoe suffered significantly fewer adverse drug reactions from chemo- and radiotherapy and had longer disease-free survival.

It has been found that intravenous treatment with mistletoe extract activates the immune system by stimulating its own killer cells against tumour cells.

Recipe for Mistletoe, cold infusion

1. Put 1 tsp of the dried mistletoe herb into a cup (or a pot if you want to prepare more than one cup).
2. Pour cold water over the herb.
3. Leave the cold infusion to stand overnight or for 8 to 12 hours.
4. Strain the infusion.
5. Heat the tea carefully up to drinking temperature.
6. Drink the tea in small sips.

Do not drink more than two cups a day.



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