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FROM THE MAGIC TREE: **THE** WONDERS OF AGARWOOD LEAVES (BEVERAGES FOR HEALING PART 2)

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Why the Aquilaria or Agarwood tree is appropriately called a Magic Tree is because the ENTIRE tree is beneficial to mankind in one way or another.



Like most people, I had my fair share of cluelessness when I first heard about Agarwood. Upon learning its sky high price, I was even more baffled! Then I started learning more about it and finally I have come to appreciate it. As the saying goes, you can't love what you don't know, right?

Agarwood or Oud, as some might call it, actually refers to resinous wood of resin-producing trees native to the forests in South Asia and South East Asia. It has several other names but these two are probably closest to us in Asia.

Now you might wonder, which part of the tree is actually worth a king's ransom? Technically speaking, all of it!

What is Agarwood?

A little bit on its scientific background, there are at least 27 species of Agarwood found around the world, which belongs to several genus and family. Perhaps the most discussed genus in scientific and non-scientific literatures is *Aquilaria* (Family: Thymeleaceae). It represents the main Agarwood producing species such as *A. malaccensis*, where its origin is Malaysia. Typically found living in tropical rainforests, *Aquilaria* can adapt to various growing conditions such as rocky, sandy and calcareous soil; well-drained slopes and ridges; and swampy areas. Common physical traits include pointed tip, shiny green, long oval foliage with a length of 5 to 8cm and a width of 3 to 4cm and bark covered with white spots. Flowers and fruits are normally found in matured trees of the age 7 to 9 years old – the former grows at the tip of small branches or next to the foliage while the latter sits in pods, round and oval with a size around 5 cm in length and 3 cm in width; the fruits normally have two seeds, often reddish, surrounded by fine hairs.



An Agarwood plantation. "Common physical traits include pointed tip, shiny green, long oval foliage with a length of 5 to 8cm and width of 3 to 4cm and bark covered with white spots" [Photo sourced from [APC](#)]

Which part of Agarwood is Precious?

Now you might wonder, which part of the tree is actually worth a king's ransom? Technically speaking, all of it! The resinous part is normally carved into chips for burning and the rest of the trunk is used to extract oil for essential oil, perfumery and aromatherapy products- these too, have medicinal properties like giving sedative effect and inducing stress-relief hormones. In an earlier article by Livingm'sia, ample introduction was given to Agarwood and its sacred use as essential oil. If you have missed the first part on the series, click: [From The Magic Tree: The Miracle of Oud Oil \(Essential Oils for Healing Part 1\)](#)



The leaves of the Agarwood are just as valuable. [Photo from Planet Ayurveda]

In the Agarwood industry, here in Malaysia and elsewhere, it is not just the wood but the leaves too that are valuable, especially at downstream end. Flowers, roots and seeds are used in a similar way to that of Agarwood leaves where other applications include using them as ingredient for cosmetics, personal care such as soap, or household care like detergent. This will make a good topic for future discussion.

There is an assortment of Agarwood-based products that are being made from various parts of Agarwood. The tea though, is made from Agarwood leaves. It is probably the second most lucrative use of Agarwood for nutraceutical, medicinal, and pharmaceutical applications, which will be the focus of this article.

Nowadays, Agarwood tea is no longer in its raw form, that is, produced as dried leaves, but in more sophisticated instant beverages — all thanks to new technology developed by passionate scientists and technologists!



An assortment of Agarwood-based products made from various parts of the Agarwood tree.

First, let's take a Trip to Gopeng to check out the flourishing Agarwood/Gaharu Tea Industry. This plantation is very famous in Malaysia!

Gaharu Tea Valley (Agarwood Tea Leaves Plantation)



More on Agarwood and its downstream applications:

Want to read up? Check this out! Just click on the titles.

- [Agarwood: Science Behind the Fragrance](#)

Malaysia's own R&D

- [Product development and enhancement of Malaysia's downstream Agarwood industry](#)

Business ventures

- [GOC100 partners Aseagate to enter Agarwood industry in Laos](#)



This is the miraculous Magic Tree: the Agarwood tree.

Read Part 3 of the Magic Tree series: From The Magic Tree: Oud to Look Good, Smell Good & Feel Good (Fragrance & Perfume Part 3)

Agarwood Leaves and Healing

Countries like China, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong have been exporting Agarwood leaves and have mostly been using it as the prime ingredient in their traditional herbal teas. A fusion of high quality Agarwood leaves and other herbs like [misai kucing](#) and [pecah beling](#) are claimed to be effective in treating various diseases such as gout, hypertension, diabetes and many others. Believed to improve blood circulation, a mix of Agarwood and apricot is purported to work wonders in stabilizing [blood pressure](#) and reducing risk of stroke and associated diseases like [Parkinson's](#).

Further from being consumed as a beverage, the leaves are also processed into dietary supplements that purportedly act as an anti-cancer and anti-diabetic agents. For tea drinkers and health freaks, a daily cup of Agarwood tea is like a pick-me-up to pack your day with goodness and vitality.



Nothing like a refreshing cup of Agarwood tea to quench your thirst and give you health and goodness to the last drop [Photo sourced from [Asian Agarwood](#)]

Agarwood Leaves in Alternative Medicine

Pure Claims or Real Gains?

Listed in the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Unani System, Ayurvedic and more (click [HERE](#) for full list), Agarwood leaf extract is definitely an intriguing subject in the field of alternative medicine. Recent interest in using the leaf extract as an active component in modern alternative medicine has called for extensive research to scientifically investigate the active compounds present in Agarwood leaves and possible mechanisms exhibiting medical benefits as frequently claimed.

A number of research has found that the leaf is indeed, composed of complex chemical compounds that exhibit biological properties like anti-arthritic, -diabetic, -oxidant, and -stress when tested at laboratory level. However, to which extent can science prove these assertions?

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Agarwood leaves against Diabetes

One of the most common disorders is probably diabetes, a condition developed due to insulin resistance in the body. It is often characterized by hyperglycemia or glucose intolerance which diagnostically appears as high blood glucose. It is so common, and worrying at the same time, that it is happening to 415 million people and causing the death of 1.5 to 5 million people a year! That's a terrifying statistic, isn't it?

You can learn more about diabetes from [WebMD](#).

Recent studies published in [NCBI](#) reported on hypoglycemic – as opposed to hyperglycemic – and the anti-oxidant effects of Agarwood leaves *in vitro* and *in vivo*, when orally administered. The leaves were found to significantly reduce the glucose level in blood, a manifestation of hypoglycemia effect, by inhibiting α -glucosidase – the key enzyme responsible to breakdown carbohydrates into sugar molecules. To prove that Agarwood could be just as good as anti-diabetic drugs already commercially available, a thorough clinical investigation is required. Even so, one can only expect that daily intake of products containing Agarwood leaves may help to prevent, if not cure, diabetes.

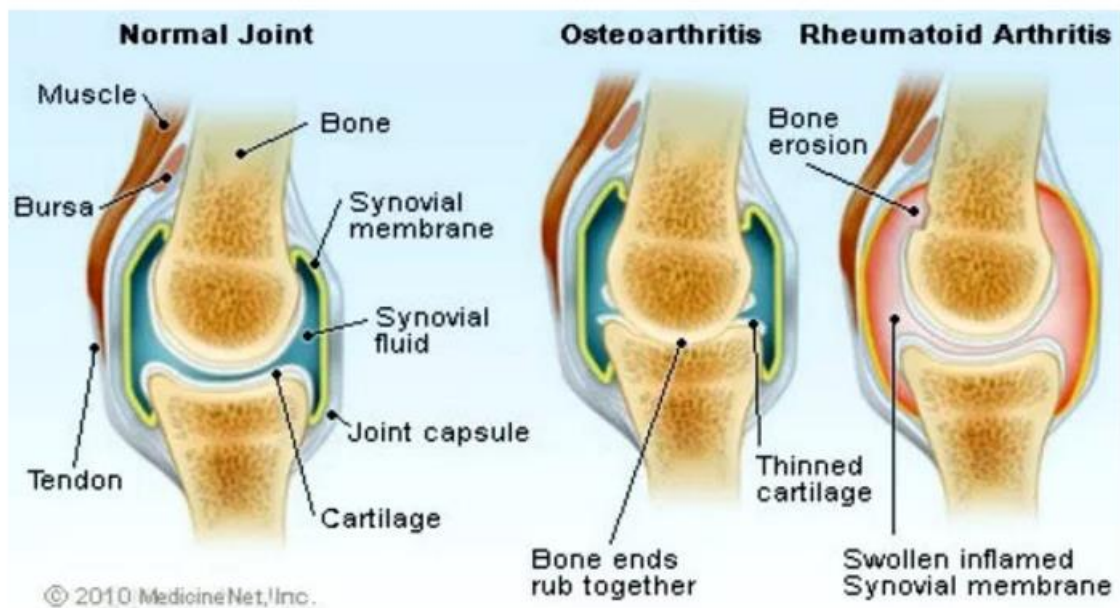


Agarwood leaves against Arthritis

Gout and rheumatoid arthritis are often associated with burning pain, stiffness and swelling in a joint and other tissues. It happens when there is too much uric acid in the blood that causes the formation of solid crystals in joints, which eventually results in inflammation around the affected area.

Other diseases caused by high level uric acid in blood include formation of kidney stones and kidney failure. Sounds dreadful? You bet! Apparently, there's one research paper, among several others, reporting on possible anti-arthritic effect of Agarwood leaves as it brings down the level of uric acid in blood.

The scientists went on to describe the presence of bioactive compounds in Agarwood leaves responsible to manifest such effects; the compounds may either inhibit xanthine oxidase (XOD) – an enzyme mostly associated with increase in uric acid level – or reabsorb the urate in renal, allowing excretion of uric acid from the body. The anti-inflammatory properties of the leaves can also potentially help to alleviate joint pain, a condition linked to arthritis. Now, doesn't that sound promising to people with gout and rheumatism?



Normal and Arthritic Joints

This is how the normal and arthritic joints look like – the latter (rheumatoid) is the result of acid uric built-up). Agarwood exhibits anti-arthritic and – inflammatory effects which could potentially cure arthritis.

At this point we can only be contented that there are medically-beneficial compounds present in Agarwood. Scientists still have a long way to clinically prove these purported medical benefits but there is no doubt that we are coming closer to the answer every day.

Innovative Process – from Leaves to Nutritious Food!

The landscape of the Agarwood market has dramatically changed over the years. From traditional trading, it is now an industrialised business with more diversified market segments like never before. Scientists and technologists have been working together to solve issues related to the Agarwood industry from its upstream to its downstream levels. Perhaps the most remarkable example is the diversification of Agarwood products in the food and beverages (F&B) industry.

It was not until recent years that Agarwood-based food and beverages started to hit the market in its various forms.



Agarwood leaves used to be sold in its raw form before innovation hit the industry. [Photo sourced from [Gaharu West Jawa](#)]

Modernising for Consumer Convenience

These days, we all love instant drinks (and even food!). No doubt about it – instant meals and drinks make our lives easier by reducing the hassle of preparation in today's busy lifestyles.

That was when the 3-in-1 F&B concept got introduced enmasse by global companies like PepsiCo and Nestle. On seeing this, local companies started to follow suit. Agarwood players are the same as they see this as an opportunity to diversify an otherwise limited Agarwood market. They have introduced Agarwood 3-in-1 drinks to the market. Thanks to the advancement of technology, Agarwood leaves can now be processed into fine powder and mixed with other ingredients, before nicely packaged into convenient sachets. Just like any other 3-in-1 product, the preparation requires only the addition of hot water and (voila!) it's ready to drink!



Taking a step ahead, Leaflife by RAL Plantation created this 4-in-1 coffee. Click on the picture to get to their [website](#).

But wait, it doesn't stop with 3-in 1 drinks! Premixed or ready-to-drink Agarwood tea and coffee might be the more convenient choice especially for those who are always on the go. Twist the cap and enjoy the goodness of Agarwood in every sip!



Lestary makes wonderful teas and other Agarwood/Gaharu beverages and products [Photo by [Gaharu Lestari](#)]. Click on the picture to get to Lestary or call their hotline at 013-433-5541. Alternatively, call: +605-432-1002.

Where can I learn more about these products?

You might want to look up the latest on Agarwood products by browsing through [House of Gaharu](#), an online selling platform managed by *Persatuan Pengusaha Gaharu Bumiputera Malaysia (PENGHARUM)*. PENGHARUM was established in 2009 with the aim of helping local Agarwood players market their products locally and globally. For more information, you can write to pengharummalaysia@gmail.com, go to their [website](#) or connect to their [Facebook](#) by clicking on the word.



You can find this ready-to-drink Agarwood Tea at [House of Gaharu](#) and the Coffee at [Leaflife](#) by RAL Plantation.

Trust me, you won't be disappointed.