

Rooibos tea

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Aspalathus linearis

Afrikaans for "red bush"; scientific name *Aspalathus linearis*) is a broom-like member of the legume family of plants growing in South Africa's fynbos.

Rooibos is grown only in a small area in the region of the Western Cape province.[2] Generally, the leaves are oxidized, a process often, and inaccurately, referred to as fermentation by analogy with teaprocessing terminology. This process produces the distinctive reddish-brown colour of rooibos and enhances the flavour. Unoxidized "green" rooibos is also produced, but the more demanding production process for green rooibos (similar to the method by which green tea is produced) makes it more expensive.

Nutritional and health benefits

Rooibos is becoming more popular in Western countries particularly among health-conscious consumers, due to its high level of antioxidants such as aspalathin [3] and nothofagin, its lack of caffeine, and its low tannin levels compared to fully oxidized black tea or unoxidized green tea leaves.

Rooibos also contains a number of phenolic compounds, including flavanols, flavones, flavanones, and dihydrochalcones.[4] Rooibos is purported to assist with nervous tension, allergies and digestive problems.[5] Traditional medicinal uses of rooibos in South Africa include alleviating infantile colic, allergies, asthma and dermatological problems.[6][7]

Scientific study

Although human studies of rooibos are scarce in the scientific literature, animal studies suggest it has potent antioxidant, immune-modulating and chemopreventive effects. In addition, rooibos tea has not been found to have any adverse effects.[8] It is often claimed that "Green" rooibos (see above) has a higher antioxidant capacity than fully oxidized. However, one study, using two different ways of measuring antioxidant activity, found conflicting data, with green rooibos showing more activity under one measure, and less activity using the other. The study also found conflicting data when comparing both forms of rooibos to black, green, and oolong tea, although it consistently found both forms to have less activity than green tea.[9]

References

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