

Rainforest miracle cures!

The rainforest of Ecuador, known as the Ecuadorian Amazon or Oriente, is one of the richest, most diverse habitats on the planet, says Fox TV's "Medicine Hunter," Chris Kilham. "It's also home to one of the widest arrays of healing plants in the world"—more and more of which are now available here at home! Curious to see what they are and what they can do for you?

Pau d'Arco Boosts immunity!

This extract of the bark of the Amazon tabebuia tree has been used to ease chemo side effects and even shrink tumors, and no wonder: Research reveals it's chock-full of potent antiviral, antifungal and anti-inflammatory compounds. It's also been shown to boost production of killer T-cells, which is why Kilham recommends it for anyone fighting a fever, infection, cold or the flu, or feeling generally run down!

❖ **Reap the benefits!** Buy pau D'Arco in tea or capsule form in health-food stores; follow package for dosage. Do not take it if you're pregnant or nursing.

Chuchuhuasi Fights pain and inflammation!

Arthritis acting up? Strain your back? It's chuchuhuasi—specifically, the bark of this tree—to the rescue! Traditionally used for back pain, chuchuhuasi translates to "trembling back." And apart from its powerful muscle-relaxant and anti-inflammatory properties, it's also proven to have a general revitalizing effect.

❖ **Reap the benefits!** In the Amazon, the bark is used to make tea; you can find the bark in health-food stores. Steep in hot water for 10 to 15 minutes.

Guayusa Delivers jitter-free alertness!

For thousands of years, natives of the Oriente have been sipping guayusa the way we do coffee, and you might want to, too. Guayusa packs more of a caffeine wake-up wallop than black tea and is loaded with calming L-theanine, Kilham says, so it's a stimulant without the rough edges. Shamans have long used it to heighten intuition—and science confirms it stimulates the pineal gland, also known as the "third eye"!

❖ **Reap the benefits!** The brand Kilham recommends? Runa, about \$7 for a 15-bag box at Runa.org or Daily Grommet.com. Due to its high caffeine content, the tea bags can be reused!

Important: As always, talk to your doctor before taking any new supplement.

Plantains Cure stomach bugs!

Plantains, which are related to bananas but are starchier and less sweet, protect the gut and stomach lining from unfriendly bacteria, reveals new British research. In fact, tests show that, thanks to their large amount of insoluble fiber, plantains can reduce E. coli in the digestive tract by up to 82%! They're also rich in potassium, vitamin C and vitamin A, adds Kilham—and because they contain tryptophan, they just might put you in a brighter mood!

❖ **Reap the benefits!** Luckily, plantains are now so popular here, they're sold in many supermarkets. They need to be cooked before eating; to peel one the easy way, cut off the ends, make two shallow slits along the length of its tough skin and remove the peel in two long sections.

Chanca piedra Zaps kidney and gallstones!

Its name literally means "stone breaker," and it more than lives up to its billing: When German scientists gave more than 100 kidney-stone patients this rainforest herb, they were amazed to find 94% were stone-free within a week or two! Preliminary lab studies suggest it won't just dissolve kidney and gallstones, it'll actually prevent them from forming! Bonus: Brazilian and Asian research reveals it fights pain more effectively than aspirin or acetaminophen!

❖ **Reap the benefits!** Take as needed in capsules, powder or liquid (sold at HerbsPro.com or SwansonVitamins.com). To make a tea, add 2 Tbs. powder to hot water, steep 10 minutes and strain before drinking.

Boldo Aids digestion!

One of the most popular herbs in South America, boldo is as common in supermarkets and drugstores there as aspirin is here. Studies show the leaves of this rainforest shrub tame tummy troubles like indigestion and fight constipation by stimulating production of bile in the liver, which gets the digestive process moving!

❖ **Reap the benefits!** Boldo can be found online at MotherNature.com and HerbCo.com. Use the powder or liquid extract, or sip a cup or two of the licorice-tasting tea as needed. (Do not take if you're pregnant, nursing or using blood-thinning medications.)

Cocoa Makes your heart and brain healthier!

Go ahead, indulge in a chocolate bunny or two! "Cocoa is packed with flavonols that are more effective for lowering cholesterol than any statin drug," says Kilham. And British research shows it revs circulation and helps prevent heart disease! And arriba cocoa, grown only in Ecuador's rainforest, is used in products worldwide, so you might just find it in your Easter basket!

❖ **Reap the benefits!** Look for bunnies made from dark rather than milk chocolate, which has more antioxidants. Or try Hachez Cocoa D'Arriba Classic 77% Dark Chocolate Bar (\$3.95 at Amazon.com) or Lindt Excellence Ecuador 75% (\$2.79 at Lindt stores).

—Barbara Hustedt Crook