

GROWING AND USING SOAP NUTS FOR A GREENER WASHING

Soap Nuts, produced by the Sapindus Mukorossi tree and containing *Saponin* are enjoying ever-increasing success on the international markets of consumers who care about the environment.

The nut is the dried fruit of the tree and the *Saponin* released when in contact with water creates a mild suds similar to soap. Soap Nuts have become a very popular environmental friendly alternative to manufactured chemical detergents.

The *Sapindus mukorossi* tree grows at an altitude between 200m and 1500m throughout a region around the Himalayans, extending from southern China, Nepal and northern India. It grows uncultivated in deprived soil and it is a comparatively resilient tree as it deters insects and diseases.

The Soap Nut trees begin producing Soap Nuts in 9-10 years and bear fruit for about 90 years. They produce small white grouped flowers during spring, the fruit appears in July-August and ripens by November-December. The round nuts are 2 - 2.5 cm in diameter and are collected in winter months (November-December) for seed and for sales on the market.

The *Saponin* is present only in the shell, while the nut inside the shell is used as seed for planting new trees. After removing the seeds, the shells are dried in the sun and can directly be used for washing and cleaning. For hundreds of years, people in India, Nepal and China have been doing their laundry and cleaning with Soap Nuts.

Growing organically, processed, packed and sold by national or international companies all over the world, the Soap Nuts are available for use in the washing machine. Inserted in cotton bags, they can be used for different washing cycles.

The great success of the Soap Nuts among ecological consumers derives from their following remarkable characteristics:

- Soap Nuts are 100% natural and represent an effective alternative to the use of current detergents that contain many toxic chemicals remaining in the clothes after being washed and ending in the water with a long term effect on the environment.
- Soap Nuts are hypoallergenic and suitable for babies and sensitive skins.
- They clean dirty laundry very effectively and at the same time preserve the colours better than chemical detergents. They can be used on all fabrics, and at all temperatures, including delicate garments like silk, cashmere and wool.
- Soap Nuts are 100% biodegradable and after their use as soap, they can be recycled to make compost. Washing water from Soap Nuts can also be reused in the garden for watering plants.
- The production process is organic and does not harm the environment. Soap Nuts are considered renewable primary products.



The commercial success of the Soap Nuts in the new ecologic international markets represents a great opportunity for producers of mountain areas where the *Sapindus Mokorossi* tree grows. An effective local organization of services to ensure the issues related to quality, storage, transportation, and organized marketing, can guarantee that an important quota of added value of the production of Soap Nuts directly benefit the population of the territory.

In Nepal, the [International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development ICIMOD](#) started in 2015 an impacting project for the [Promotion of the Ritha \(Soap Nut\) Value Chain in the Baitadi and Darchula Districts](#). The project, investing in local actors, shows an effective example of building a territorial organization to ensure that an important resource such as the Ritha trees can strengthen the local economy. The project involved development village committees where the plant grows and cooperatives engaged in the collection and trade in order to identify the major challenges and to put in place the following strategic activities for the implementation of Ritha Value Chain in the two Districts:

- Develop their knowledge and skills on better business planning and governance mechanisms, promoting nurseries, high-quality seedlings, scaling up of plantations, both in private land and community forests.
- Support cooperative storage facilities in order to minimize damage and wastage of Ritha crop through the construction of collection centres in the villages and larger storage facilities in the market hub of the area. These facilities also allow the producers to sell at the best prices the yield of Ritha produced each season.
- Create a quality certification system through capacity building on appropriate harvesting practices, quality segregation, grading, packaging and branding. These activities allow to increase the potential market of the product and the overall price.
- Support product diversification and development of the Ritha brand. Ritha is currently traded from Nepal in the raw form and interventions have already been planned to obtain an added value, such as making powder, extracting oil, or making herbal soaps and detergents.

A participatory planning of the Ritha Value Chain allows not only to improve profits with export but also to locally improve the sustainable use of the other great potentialities of the Soap Nuts Tree in the field of medicine, to produce natural insecticides or by using the wood of the tree in rural building construction.

The development of similar participative value chains allows consumers to contribute to the development of local economies in the territories where the Soap Nuts tree grows. By planting and growing these trees with ecological practices and using the Soap Nuts as an alternative to current detergents, the alliance between local producers and consumers can contribute to improving the environment, bringing benefits for all.

To know more

[Sapindusmukorossi.com website](http://Sapindusmukorossi.com)

[Sapindus Mukorossi in Wikipedia](#)

[ICIMOD Value Chain Project](#)

[ICIMOD website](#)



[ICIMOD 2017 Annual Report](#)

[Soapnutchina.blogspot.com](#)

[Soap Nuts in gaiaconnexion.com website](#)

[Soap Nuts in anadifoundation.org website](#)

[Soap Nuts in nepl.com.np website](#)

[Soap Berries in theindianvegan.blogspot.com](#)

[Soapnuts.in website](#)

[Soap Berries in bmfoodcoop.org.au](#)

[Soap Nuts in 1millionwomen.com](#)

[Soapnuts.co.nz](#)

[Econutssoap.com website](#)

[Soap Nuts in naturosoap.co.za](#)

[Superiorsoapnuts.com website](#)

