

# 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Saudi Open House

## What is Henna?

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

'*Henna*' is a flowering plant. It is native to tropical and subtropical regions of Africa, southern Asia and northern Australasia with an arid or at least seasonally dry climate.

It is a shrub growing to 6 m tall. The flowers are fragrant, produced in conical panicles 10–40 cm long, each flower 5 mm diameter, with four white petals. The fruit is a dry capsule 6–8 mm diameter, containing numerous 1–2.5 mm seeds.

### **Cultivation and uses:-**

Henna is used as a dye, particularly in hair coloring, and temporary body art known as "'mehndi'" (also written as "'mehendi'" or "'mehandi'"). The dye is extracted from the dried leaf and petioles of the plant. The natural dye is traditionally found in India, Pakistan, Iran, and North Africa, and also in expatriate communities from these countries. It is also widely used in the Arabic peninsula.

### **Preparing the Henna:-**

To create henna, the leaves are dried and ground into a powder that is greenish-brown. Strong tea, lemon juice and essential oils (such as tea tree and lavender) can be added to release the dye from the powder, and sugar is mixed in to produce a mud-like consistency. The resulting paste needs to set for about 24-30 hours at room temperature to allow the dye to release fully. This can be sped up to as little as 1 hour by warming the mixture to 40 °C.

Allergic reactions to natural henna are rare, and typically do not cause serious health effects. Symptoms are usually apparent within a few hours, and are generally limited to mild itching, shortness of breath, and/or tightness in the chest.

### **\*Use of henna as body art:-**

Mehndi is the application of henna as a temporary form of skin decoration. This usage is popular in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia as well as expatriate communities from these areas. It is usually drawn on the hands and feet, where the designs will last the longest.

Henna paste is usually applied to the skin using a plastic cone or a paint brush, but sometimes a small metal-tipped jacquard bottle used for silk painting (a "jac bottle") is used. The affected area is then wrapped with tissue, plastic, or medical tape to lock in body heat, creating a more intense color on the skin. The wrap is worn overnight and then removed. The final color is reddish brown and can last anywhere from two weeks to several months depending on the quality of the paste.

The patterns of Mehndi are typically quite intricate, and predominantly applied to brides before wedding ceremonies. However, traditions in Bangladesh, Kashmir and Sudan sometimes expect bridegrooms to be painted as well. In Rajasthan (northwest India), where mehndi is a very ancient folk art, the grooms are given designs which are often as elaborate as those for brides. In Kerala (South India), Henna is known as "Mylanchi" and is commonly used by the Mappila (Muslim) community during weddings and festivals.

Mehndi decorations became fashionable in the West in the late 1990s, where they are sometimes called "henna tattoos". This American marketing slang is inaccurate, since tattoos are defined as permanent surgical insertion of pigments "underneath" the skin.