

An extract taken from a rare tree has been combined with herbal medicine and acupuncture to make a unique holistic treatment, explains Ruth Hajioff

**R**uth Hajioff hit a low point in her life when glandular fever and a failed marriage combined to put her out of action for months on end.

Suffering from extreme post-viral fatigue, the mother-of-three could barely turn her head or get out of bed.

"My marriage had broken up, then I got glandular fever and post-viral syndrome and I couldn't do anything for the best part of a year."

But, on a friend's recommendation, she tried Chinese herbs and acupuncture and felt better within weeks.

"He asked me to write down my symptoms. I filled out two pages. He said it would take six months to feel better, but the change after five weeks was incredible.

Her "miraculous" recovery led her to spend the next five years learning the secrets of Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture.

"Before I got ill, I was married at 18 and a housewife. I didn't think I was capable of studying but my therapist suggested I do something different with my life, and I did."

#### Herbal practitioner

On a trip to Morocco in 2000, Hajioff visited a renowned herbal practitioner who introduced her to the little-known remedy argan oil.

"He prescribed it orally for heart problems, but it's been used by Berber women for thousands of years to nourish their hair, skin and nails and it's in the Moroccan materia medica as a treatment for chickenpox, acne, eczema and psoriasis.

"Researching folk remedies I found it used for newborns to boost the immune system and as an insect repellent."



■ Ruth Hajioff



■ Oil (above) is extracted from the argan seeds (left) the argan tree, which grows in southwest Morocco

Discovering that it wasn't available in the UK, Hajioff ended up buying a cold press and setting up an ethical-trade production centre in Morocco.

Now she has developed a 'facial awakening system' a unique combination of acupuncture, electricity, Chinese herbs and argan oil that combines Hajioff's passions and expertise to offer a non-invasive holistic facial at her Hampstead Garden Suburb treatment room.

She claims it tones facial muscles, improves skin tone and collagen, reduces puffiness and fine lines and increases blood flow to restore vitality.

First, a blend of essential oils and argan oil is introduced with help from a weak electric microcurrent. Then gentle acupuncture is used on the face and body. Finally herbal supplements can be prescribed to nourish the complexion from the inside.

Hajioff's studies included learning cosmetic acupuncture in China and she has also been practising as a qualified acupuncturist and Chinese herbalist since 1994.

She markets argan oils and argan-based beauty products under her Wild Wood Groves label.

Hajioff says argan oil is rich in vitamin E and renowned for its anti-ageing properties, and her products are a favourite of model Sophie Dahl.

"The oil is rich in essential fatty acids to keep you moisturised. It has sapsins which soften the skin, it reduces fine lines by bringing water to the lipid layer and aids cell structure and renewal," she says.

Argan oil is produced from the seed of the argan tree that only grows in southwest Morocco, where just 860,000 hectares of them remain.

The trees are protected by Unesco as a biosphere heritage and, through oil production, Hajioff is not only helping with the conservation of the tree stock but providing employment to Berber women at a wage greater than they would be paid by the local co-operative.

Hajioff has written a pamphlet entitled *Argan, The Sacred Grove* about the oil and her range includes moisturisers, candles, soaps and aromatherapy infused oils for various skin types.

■ For appointments or products, contact 0208 4582738 or go to [www.wildwoodgroves.com](http://www.wildwoodgroves.com).