

עוזרר קוצני

## Spiny Hawthorn – *Crateagus Monogyna*

### A Thorny Heart Healer

Thorns are all that met our eyes when we chose a piece of land in the Judean hills, Israel. Yet, they could be dealt with a pickax and hoe. A thorny scrub, however, stubbornly kept growing back, threatening the plum trees and grapevines. I knew it was a native tree called עוזרר/Uzrar in Hebrew. It had tiny, dirty-yellow, apple-like berries which tasted sour and acrid. It seemed like a useless thorn which had to be gotten rid of. I later learned that most of the various kinds of thorny plants gracing our beloved land are replete with medicinal properties. At one point, it dawned on me that the unwelcome scrubby weed in my garden was none other than the renowned hawthorn bush, which has recently enjoyed an herbal renaissance. It has been crowned as one of the prime cardiac tonics, much needed in our time when heart attacks run rampant. Usually, Western herbology relies upon Chinese medicine but when it comes to the hawthorn, the Chinese learned from the West the value of hawthorn as a heart healer. It treats the following heart conditions:

- Coronary artery disease
- Valvular heart disease
- Congestive Heart Failure
- Post-Heart Attacks
- Elevated blood lipids (cholesterol, triglycerides)



### The Rare Red Kind

Still, I felt resistance to this irritating thorn, with its muddled, drab looking berries, which isn't exactly a feast for the eyes. This was, until, I walked through my neighbor's garden (with permission) on my way to teach my Shabbat class. There, I saw the most beautiful, graceful hawthorn tree with bright red berries. These red berries intrigued me, since, I thought that hawthorn berries are only yellow brown. When I returned to my own back garden to compare, indeed, there were no red berries on my hawthorn. Oh well, the neighbor's berries are always redder... After doing a bit of research, it turns out that although the hawthorn genus *Crataegus* contains 200 species, only four species grow in Israel: Spiny Hawthorn, which is common and has yellow fruits, and three rare species whose fruits are red. One such species is called *Crataegus azarolus*. Perhaps, this is the kind that met my eyes at the neighbors.'

### Native to Israel since Ancient Times

I'm not sure which of these four species is the one mentioned in four different tractates of the Mishnah. In *Tractate Demai* 1:1, hawthorn is one of the eight kinds of fruit that are treated leniently regarding *demai* [when we cannot trust whether the person, who took tithes, set aside all of the different kinds of tithes properly]. From *Tractate Kelayim* 1:4, we learn that the quince and the hawthorn do not constitute *kilayim* [forbidden grafting]. Yet, the apple and the hawthorn, although similar, nevertheless constitute *kilayim* [in respect to grafting]. In *Tractate Ma'aserot* 1:3, the hawthorn is liable for tithes after their fuzzy surface fades – a sign that they are one third ripe. In *Tractate Uktzin* 1:6, the hawthorn is mentioned among the fruits whose stem transfers impurity. Since hawthorn is mentioned repeatedly in the Mishnah, we see how it has been native to Israel from ancient times.

### Synthesizing Eastern and Western Medicinal Properties

In the West, the hawthorn is considered one of the most reliable herbs for heart problems. In Chinese medicine, the berries are used to aid digestion. Middle Eastern folk medicine synthesizes these two. Since ancient times, the fruits of the spiny hawthorn, rich in vitamin C, are used for healing diarrhea, sore throat, internal hemorrhage, dizziness, convulsions, high blood pressure, atherosclerosis and heart disease. An alcoholic beverage, made from the flowers, is used to treat insomnia, menopausal symptoms, anxiety and nervousness. A boiled drink of the bark or roots is used against high blood pressure. The flowers strengthen the heart and improve overall heart function. For a mild heart tonic and preventative treatment against atherosclerosis, make an infusion of the buds as they just begin to open. Use two table spoons of the buds to one cup of boiling water. Drink twice a day. You can also make a tincture by steeping bruised berries in 40-50% alcohol for two weeks, then strain out the berries. The recommended amount is 5-12 drops three times a day. Hawthorn preparations are also used as a wash for sores, boils, ulcers, itching, and frostbite.

### Humble and Kind Personality

The hawthorn has a persistent, yet humble and kind personality that readily gives of its goodness. It is versatile and supports more than 300 species of wildlife. Its flowers provide nectar and pollen for both bees and butterflies. The hawthorn berries are rich in antioxidants and are eaten by many migrating birds such as redwings, fieldfares and thrushes, as well as small mammals. The dense thorny foliage serves as a preferred hiding and nesting shelter for many bird species, including small song birds.

### The Spiritual Heart Opening Qualities of Hawthorn

Hawthorn testifies to the main principle of Judaism: infusing the physical with the spiritual, and bringing the purity of Divine awareness into the most passionate parts of our physical life. Its white flowers represent spiritual purity, while the bright red berries represent passion that extends into the physical realm. The fact that hawthorn grows on poor soil, teaches us how to adapt to any situation, employing unforeseen hardiness and strength. This energy helps those of us who steadfastly keep going, while burying pain and bitterness deep within the heart. We often protect our hearts with thorns, when we have felt deep pain. The hawthorn's sharp thorns reflect this pain, which may be due to ancestral stories of famine and persecution, loss of land and loved ones, and even the trauma of being a holocaust survivor, be it second or third generation. As a flower essence, hawthorn can help in healing heartache. It encourages self-love and self-acceptance and helps open the heart to giving and receiving love. The fact that hawthorn is not always the most attractive plant teaches us that true love is not about appearance. Rather, we need to look below the surface to what lies underneath. Hawthorn helps us to develop courage. The word '*courage*' is associated with the heart, as '*cor*' is Latin for heart. Having courage and being willing to take risks is truly an open-hearted state. Thus, hawthorn helps us to forgive, while letting go of pain and past traumas. It opens our heart to trust and bestow unconditional love and compassion. I understand, now, why it was the red hawthorn that caught my eye and triggered this research. The redness represents the blood and its organ – the heart. Thus, especially the red hawthorn promotes a healthy heart both on a physical, emotional and spiritual level.

**Hands On:**

Here is a simple hawthorn jelly recipe that you can relish with your morning cereal and as a sweet heart-healthy afternoon treat. Enjoy this autumnal hawthorn jelly recipe!

**Hawthorn Jelly**

1. Find a nice Hawthorn bush filled with ripe red hawthorn berries.
2. Pick about 3 cups of hawthorn berries for 1 jar of hawthorn jelly.
3. Roll a clump of berries (stalks and all) in between your hands, to remove the stalks
4. Wash the fruits and drain them.
5. Place the haws in your fruit processor until mashed
6. Put your mash into a heavy saucepan, and cover with 3 cups of water.
7. Bring to the boil and simmer for 1 hour.
8. Now strain the mixture over night using some muslin, or as I did, a jelly bag.  
To keep the jelly clear do not squeeze the jelly bag, just let the juice drip. If you don't mind if your hawthorn jelly is not clear then squeeze away.
9. For every cup of juice add one cup of brown sugar.
10. Add the juice of one lemon.
11. Mix the sugar and lemon juice into a heavy saucepan along with the hawthorn juice. Bring the mixture to the boil, stirring continuously until the sugar has dissolved.
12. Now rapid boil for 10 minutes until the jelly has reached setting point.
13. Skim off any foam from the top of the jelly liquid, and pour into sterilized, warm jars and screw on the lids.