

NEEM

Neem is a tree native to India. It grows quickly and has a thick, round crown. It can be as tall as 20-30m and has wide branches. In cold, winter months it loses its leaves and new leaves appear in spring.

Native trees are those found naturally in a region for many many years. These are trees that have not been brought from a different place by people. These trees have a close relationship with animals found in the area- from birds, insects, spiders to bigger animals. A tree's crown is made up of its branches and leaves. If you observe a tree carefully, you can tell the shape of its crown.

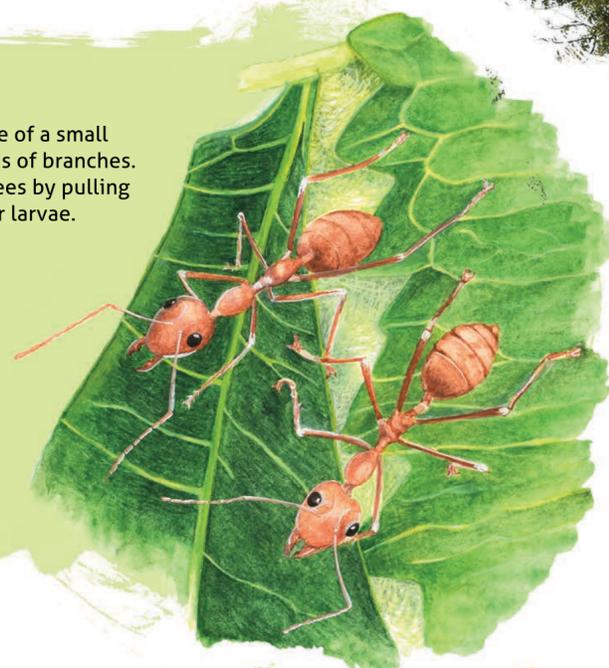
LEAVES

A leaf of a Neem tree is made up of small, curved 'leaflets' which grow on either side of a small stem. Each Neem leaf can have 20-30 leaflets. The leaves grow in clusters at the ends of branches. Many insects and spiders live among the leaves. Weaver ants build nests in Neem trees by pulling the edges of leaves together and sticking them using glue-like silk produced by their larvae.

Each leaflet has a zig-zag edge. Which other plants have leaves with a zig-zag edge?

Find a neem tree near you- pluck one leaf, smell and taste it. Does the taste remind you of anything else?

Are neem leaves used in your home? Speak to your friends and neighbours and ask them if and how they use neem leaves. Look at the labels of your toothpaste, soap or hair oil - do any of them list neem leaves as an ingredient?



FLOWERS

Neem flowers are small, white and fragrant. The flowers have a sweet, 'honey-like' smell and many bees, moths and butterflies visit them. Among these are the tiny, stingless bee and the Lime Swallowtail butterfly. People use neem flowers too, especially in their cooking! Do you know any dishes where neem flowers are used?

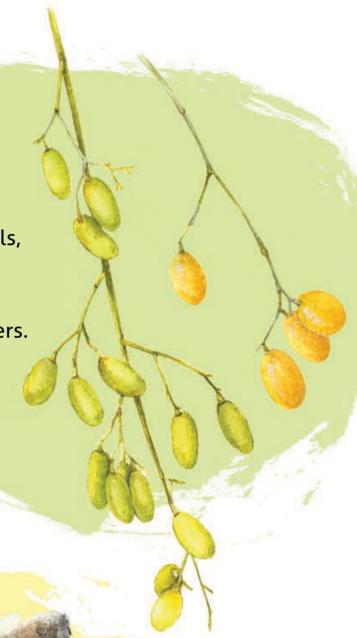


FRUITS AND SEEDS

Fruits of the neem tree are smooth, oval and yellowish-green.

Many birds and bats enjoy these fruits. Bulbuls, barbets and koels are some of the birds that feed on these fruits.

Squeeze a ripe neem fruit between your fingers. How many seeds did you find inside?



BARK AND BRANCHES

The bark of the Neem tree has many lines and grooves. If you look closely, you might find some insects and spiders on the neem tree's trunk. You may see small animals like squirrels, owls and birds like the Oriental White Eye among the branches.

Take a piece of paper and crayons, keep the paper against the bark and run your crayon on it to make a bark-rubbing. What pattern do you see? How would you describe the bark of the neem tree?

