

The National Institutes of Health (NIH), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the primary Federal agency for conducting and supporting medical research has started to pay attention to an important plant. A recent article in the March 2008 issue of *NIH Record* held a “mystery plant challenge”. The following is an excerpt of that article:

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NIH (National Institutes of Health) is the nation’s medical research agency—making important medical discoveries that improve health and save lives.

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NIH Celebrates Earth Day 2008

What Is IT?



Each year Earth Day organizers choose a mystery plant that has sources of potentially important medicines. This year’s mystery plant has important medicinal properties. **In fact, perhaps like no other single species, this plant has the potential to help reverse multiple major environmental problems and provide for many unmet human needs.** Here are some clues to help you guess what this year’s mystery plant is:

Unlike the plants in previous contests that came from Africa, IT originally came from Tamil Nadu. But you can now find IT grown in many tropical areas of the world.

IT can easily be grown in drought, on poor, damaged soils and can also help to reclaim them. ITs seeds also contain oil that can be used as a source of renewable energy. IT is truly amazing because IT can be:

- **Eaten**—all parts. ITs high-quality oil can be used in cooking and ITs leaves (see photo below) can be consumed as a tea and as a nutritious substitute for milk. The leaves are an excellent source of protein and iron—you won’t find that in many other plants. Here’s how IT compares with other foods: 7 times the vitamin C of oranges; 4 times the calcium of milk and twice the protein of yogurt. Many other vitamins and minerals are present—literally from A to zinc, and all the essential amino acids.
- **Grown** in all countries of the world that have significant percentages of their population malnourished. **IT could save millions of lives.**
- **Used** to purify polluted water, working as both a coagulant (for removal of turbidity) and as an anti-microbial. Extracts from its seeds can be used on a small or large scale as a low-cost, locally available alternative for water treatment chemicals. **IT is also used as medicine by native peoples to prevent or treat over 300 diseases.** Additional scientific studies are needed to confirm its effectiveness for these traditional uses. IT is known by over 100 names in different languages around the world.



As you may have already guessed, the mystery plant is our very own Miracle Tree, *Moringa oleifera*. Thanks to our Scientific Advisory Board Member, Dr. Monica Marcu for identifying the tree and bringing this article to our attention. It’s fun to see the world begin to endorse and recognize *Moringa* as the miracle we already know it to be at Zija. Drink life in!

