

# Natural Rubber

Natural rubber or caoutchouc is found as a colloidal dispersion in an aqueous solution (latex) produced by many plants .

The latex should not be confused with tree sap. It is thought that it acts mainly as a defense against herbivorous insects and slugs. It has a milk like consistency which coagulates on exposure to air. It is chemically the cis-isomer of polyisoprene.

Although over 10% of plants produce latex, for example ,the dandelion, only the *Hevea Brasiliensis* tree has proved to be commercially viable yielding over 99% of the natural rubber latex produced today.

Originating in the Amazon region of South America, courtesy of industrial espionage activity by the British at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, natural rubber is now grown widely in tropical climates, particularly in Asia. Much of South America is seriously affected by leaf blight and can no longer sustain large plantations.

