

HEALTH MATTERS

Astragalus from Ancient China, or in Your Backyard

Monogram of a Helpful Herb

BY RENEE LANG, ND

A note to readers: Astragalus has reportedly been used for 4,000 years in China, where by at least one account, people keep the herb in water containers for the continual tonic effect. Dr. Lang offers the following monograph or description of this herb, also used in North America, where related varieties are known as milk vetch.

Astragalus, Huang chi root (Astragalus membranaceus)

• *Family:* Pea Family
Part used medicinally: Root
Taste: Very bitter

General Info: Astragalus, native to China, can now be found in multiple countries around the globe. While over 2000 species of Astragalus exist, only 16 can be grown in the United States. Astragalus, used medicinally in China for thousands of years, strengthens weakened individuals on multiple levels.

Therapeutic Actions: Astragalus enhances immune system function by increasing white blood cells. It nourishes the adrenals, and balances digestive and heart functions. Astragalus also protects the liver from the damaging effects of toxic agents. In short, Astragalus plays a vital role in establishing health in debilitated and weakened individuals.

Immune system effects: enhancer, restorative, stimulator; and modulator. Anti-viral and anti-bacterial. Adaptogen-system rebalancer and adrenal supportive. Heart protective and hypotensive (decreases blood pressure). Anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant.

Research Supporting the Use of Astragalus: Multiple research studies on the benefits and uses of Astragalus exist. Conditions studied range from hepatitis, cancer, heart disease, fatigue, and immune function. The following examples provide a brief introduction to the information available about Astragalus:

*A 2003 Chinese study, using an IV preparation of Astragalus in patients with congestive heart failure, showed an improvement in heart function, increased T-cell count (CD4), an improved T-cell ratio (CD4/

CD8), and decreased inflammatory markers.

*Other Chinese studies show that Astragalus plays a key role in complementary cancer care. It minimizes and protects against chemotherapy toxicity, increase immune function, improve quality of life, and inhibit tumor development. Multiple animal studies show a beneficial effect in asthma and allergies by decreasing the negative effects of histamine. Astragalus has been shown to improve digestive tone and function in animals.

More information may be found at Herbmed.org or via search on PubMed, a major source of medical information on the Internet.

Indicated Conditions for Astragalus Use: Lyme disease prevention and in early disease, Hepatitis B, fatigue, depressed immune function, colds and flus, infections, inflammation, cancer, heart disease, memory problems, allergies, congestive heart failure, and liver disease.

Use of Astragalus in persons with HIV/AIDS remains inconclusive by research standards. Most of the existent studies use Astragalus in combination with other herbs, so its effect as a singular agent is unclear. One such study, (China, 2006) showed a positive effect on immunity, viral load, and symptoms.

Non-HIV specific studies demonstrate Astragalus' ability to increase T-cells, specifically CD4 cells, and to enhance the efficacy of anti-virals. These characteristics provide a basis for the reasonable use of Astragalus in HIV/AIDS health. Again, use under the supervision of a trained healthcare provider.

Types of Medicinal Preparations for Astragalus Use: Specific dosages vary depending on severity and condition. Always use herbal products under the guidance of a trained physician or herbalist.

Decoction: 3 to 6 g of dried root per 12 oz water. Simmer

for 20 minutes, strain and drink.

Tincture: 1:5 in 30% alcohol extract.

Capsule: 300-500 mg of herb



Astragalus canadensis, Canadian Milkvech. Photo courtesy: Joe F. Duft @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / USDA NRCS. 1992. *Western wetland flora: Field office guide to plant species.* West Region, Sacramento, CA. Said to have been used by the Blackfoot who dug them in the spring for eating and used as a broth. Root is analgesic and antihemorrhagic.

per capsule. Capsules come in both whole herb and standardized preparations. Products are usually standardized to 4-hydroxy-3-methoxy isoflavone, either 0.4% or 0.5%. Most of the Chinese studies done on Astragalus were done on the whole herb.

Herb/Drug Interactions: Astragalus may increase or enhance effects of acyclovir and interferon. Astragalus may decrease effects of cyclophosphamide. Speak to your herbalist or Naturopath before using Astragalus with the above medications.

Contraindications: Late stage Lyme; organ transplants; if you are pregnant or nursing, consult with your physician or herbalist before using this herb.

Toxicity: No known toxicity. ▼

➔ If you have a specific health concern or issue that you would like presented in this article, please email Dr. Lang at dr.lang@thehealingway.net. The Healing Way is in Brattleboro, VT.

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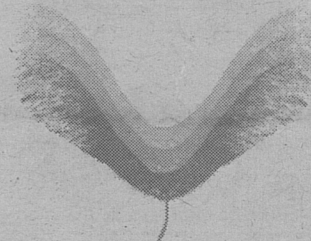
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