Astragalus membranaceous
[ass-TRA-gal-uss mem-bran-AY-see-us]

Family: Fabaceae

Names: yellow vetch, milk vetch root, Yellow Emperor, Huang qi or Huang chi (Chinese)

Description: Perennial and deciduous. Hardy to Zone 4. Three to 6 feet in height spreading on top to 3 feet. Compound leaf with 12-18 pairs of leaflets. Yellow pea-like flowers, up to an inch long, bloom in early summer. Seed pods are up to 6 inches in length. Native to eastern Asia

Cultivation: Easily propagated from seed. Astragalus seeds need to be scratched (scarified) before planting. Rubbing briefly between two pieces of fine sandpaper works well for this. They are best planted in a slightly sandy starting mix using a small peat pot or individual seed cell setup. Bottom water if possible and start your planting sometime near mid February. It will then transplant well into your garden and produce pea-like pods containing seeds in late summer of its first year. Germination in about 4 weeks with up to 12 weeks to transplant size. Must be in an extremely well drained potting mix. Plant in late spring/early summer either with transplanter or by hand. Plant on 1 foot centers with rows at 2-3 feet. Requires very well-drained soil of minimal fertility. Average to low irrigation needs in summer. Tall and spreading, it will fill in rows in the middle of the season. Cultivate before then. No pest problems but lots of root rot. Long root is harvested in late fall after 3 or more years of growth. Clean and dry the root. To dry, cut into smaller pieces to facilitate drying in 7-10 days.

Constituents: 2’3’-dihydroxy-5,6-dimethoxyisoflavane, choline, betaine, kumatakenin, sucrose, glucoronic acid, B-sitosterol

Properties: chi tonic, diuretic, anhydrotic

Medicinal Uses: strengthens digestion, raises metabolism, strengthens the immune system, and promotes the healing of wounds and injuries. It treats chronic weakness of the lungs with shortness of breath, collapse of energy, prolapse of internal organs, spontaneous sweating, chronic lesions, and deficiency edema. It is very effective in cases of nephritis that do not respond to diuretics.

In China, astragalus enjoyed a long history of use in traditional medicine to strengthen the Wei Ch’i or "defensive energy" or as we call it, the immune system. Regarded as a potent tonic for increasing energy levels and stimulating the immune system, astragalus has also been employed effectively as a
diuretic, a vasodilator and as a treatment for respiratory infections.

Antibacterial; used with the ginsengs; helpful for young adults for energy production and respiratory endurance; warming energy; helpful for hypoglycemia; used for "outer energy" as ginseng is used for "inner energy"; American Cancer Society publication reports it restored immune functions in 90% of the cancer patients studied; use to bolster the white blood cell count; strengthens the body's resistance; use for debilitating conditions; helps to promote the effects of other herbs; helps to improve digestion. Astragalus is of the most popular herbs used in the Orient; the Chinese name for astragalus is Huang Ch'i. It is a tonic producing warm energy and specifically tonifying for the lungs, spleen, and triple warmer via meridians.

In studies performed at the Nation Cancer Institute and 5 other leading American Cancer Institutes over the past 10 years, it has been positively shown that astragalus strengthens a cancer patient's immune system. Researchers believed on the basis of cell studies that astragalus augments those white blood cells that fight disease and removes some to those that make the body more vulnerable to it. There is clinical evidence that cancer patients given astragalus during chemotherapy and radiation, both of which reduce the body's natural immunity while attacking the cancer, recover significantly faster and live longer. It is evident that astragalus does not directly attack cancers themselves, but instead strengthens the body's immune system. In these same studies, both in the laboratory and with 572 patients, it also has been found that Astragalus promotes adrenal cortical function, which also is critically diminished in cancer patients. Astragalus also ameliorates bone marrow pression and gastrointestinal toxicity caused by chemotherapy and radiation. Astragalus is presently being looked upon as a possible treatment for people living with AIDS and for its potentials to prolong life.

Scientists have isolated a number of active ingredients contained in astragalus, including bioflavanoids, choline, and a polysaccharide called astragalan B. Animal studies have shown that astragalan B is effective at controlling bacterial infections, stimulating the immune system, and protecting the body against a number of toxins.

Astragalan B seems to work by binding to cholesterol on the outer membranes of viruses, destabilizing their defenses and allowing for the body's immune system to attack the weakened invader. Astragalus also increases interferon production and enhances NK and T cell function, increasing resistance to viral conditions such as hepatitis, AIDS and cancer. Astragalus shows support for peripheral vascular diseases and peripheral circulation.

*TCM:*
**Indications:** immune deficiency; cancer; chronic fatigue; high blood pressure; prolapse of internal organs; diabetes; cold and weak limbs; colds and flu; bronchitis; hepatitis; adrenal deficiency; deficient energy; external-empty symptoms, such as abnormal profuse sweating.

**Incompatibles:** Thinemys reevesii; opiates

**Dosage:** 8-15 g

**Energetics:** sweet, slightly warm

**Meridians/Organs affected:** spleen, lung

**Ritual Uses:** Spiritual properties: Astragalus assists in increasing the energy needed to bring about the manifestations desired. It will help bridge any gap there might be between the thought and the creation of the reality. Our ability to digest and assimilate our life experiences will be increased, and any tendency to be “spacy” and ungrounded will be rectified. This herb is a powerful herb of protection and can be used to create a stronger aura around oneself.

**Culinary Uses:** Excellent tasting, can be eaten in soups or stews.

**Recipes:**
Vegetarian Wei Qi Soup
Try to eat simply and become calm for a day or two before taking any tonic soup. Have two or three cups a day for one or two days, as often as once a week for a few weeks. If you feel run down or are recovering from illness.

2 medium beets with green tops
3 Tbsp olive oil
6-8 sticks astragalus
1 or 2 medium reishi mushrooms (1/4 oz)
¼ cup ligustrum fruit
medium onion, peeled and finely chopped
2 medium carrots, peeled and cut into ¼ inch slices
1 baking potato, peeled and cut into ¼ inch cubes
1 lb napa or green cabbage, thinly sliced
2 tsp sugar
¾ cup quinoa
2 Tbsp red wine vinegar
Kosher salt
Freshly ground pepper

Heat the oven to 450 degrees. Trim the beet tops to 1½ inches. Wash the beets well, and cut them in half. Coat them with 1 Tbsp of the oil, wrap individually in foil, sealing tightly. Roast for 35-60 minutes, until the beets are easily pierced with the tip of a knife.

Meanwhile, put the astragalus, reishi, and ligustrum in a large soup pot with 6 cups water. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a high simmer and cook for 45 minutes to 1 hour, uncovered, until the liquid has reduced to 2 cups. Pass the liquid through a fine strainer and discard the solids. When the roasted beets are cool enough to handle, peel them and cut into ¼ inch cubes. Reserve. Heat the remaining 2 Tbsp of oil in the soup pot over medium heat. Stir in the onion and carrots, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 7 minutes. Stir in the potato and cabbage, and cook for about 15 minutes, until the cabbage softens. Add the sugar and 6 cups fresh water. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a high simmer and cook, uncovered, until the potatoes are tender, 15-20 minutes. While the vegetables are cooking, prepare the quinoa according to package directions. When the potatoes are tender, add the cooked quinoa, reserved beets, vinegar, and astragalus broth. Stir well, and cook another 5 minutes for flavors to combine. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and serve warm. The soup will keep in the refrigerator for up to 4 days. Doesn’t freeze well. (Tonics)

**Rice with Herb Meat Sauce**

35 g astragalus
15 g red jujubes
½ lb ground pork
½ oz dried black mushrooms
1 ½ Tbsp dried baby shrimp
4 Tbsp soy sauce
1 Tbsp rice wine
1 tsp sugar
½ tsp salt

Rinse the astragalus roots and red jujubes and drain. Cut the jujubes in half and discard the pits. Add 5 cups water and bring to a boil. Turn the heat to low and simmer until the soup reduces to 2 cups and discard the dregs. Wash the black mushrooms, soak in warm water until soft. Discard the stems and dice the black mushrooms. Soak the dried baby shrimp for a while, drain and chop fine. Heat a wok, add 2 Tbsp oil and heat. Stir-fry the mushrooms and shrimp until fragrant. Add ground pork and stir-fry until the fat oozes out of the pork. Add the soy sauce, rinse wine, sugar, salt, herb soup, and 1 cup water and bring to a boil. Turn the heat to low, cover and simmer for 50 minutes. This is the herb meat sauce. Pour the sauce over boiled rice and serve. Use one portion of long grain glutinous rice to 4 portions of short grain rice for the boiled rice. Can be served with seasoned pork fiber on the side. Strengthens Chi. Replenishes the weak. Increases appetite. Effective for children’s development and elderly nutrition. (Chinese Herb Cooking for Health)

**Strawberry Lemon Cold Elixir**

1 cup sliced organic lemons with peels left on
1 cup halved organic strawberries
2 cups sugar
2 cups water
1 tsp white oak bark, cut and sifted
1 tsp willow bark, cut and sifted
1 tsp wild cherry bark, cut and sifted
3 tsp astragalus root
½ liter vodka
2 Tbsp vegetable glycerine

Combine the cut up lemons and strawberries with the sugar and water in a nonaluminum pot. Simmer until the sugar dissolves. Mix the barks and roots in a blender with the vodka. Combine the sugar and fruit with the vodka and barks in a large glass jar with a tight-fitting lid. Allow to sit for at least 6 weeks, strain and add the vegetable glycerine. Store in a dark glass bottle or in a dark cupboard. The dose is ¼ cup several times a day as needed. (An Herbal Feast)

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Sources:
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plants
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www.therosemaryhouse.com tincture
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www.woodvioletherbfarm.com Plants

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