

Chinese Tonic Herbal Materia Medica

Excerpted from *The Healing Power of Ginseng and the Tonic Herbs*

by Paul Bergner

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13 The tonic herbs

In this Chapter, I'll say some more about Asian and American ginseng, and then describe thirty-two more tonic herbs. Some of these herbs may be taken by themselves. More often they are combined in formulas, often including ginseng or its most important substitute, codonopsis. For each herb, I'll provide the following information:

- Common name, Botanical name, and Chinese name
- Primary and secondary actions as a tonic (*chi*, blood, yang, and yin). See Chapter Twelve for a more detailed explanation of these.
- Organs affected. Refer back to Table 5.1 for a general description of the organs, and to 12.1 for the symptoms of deficiency that may manifest in the major organs.
- Temperature. This refers to the warming, cooling, or neutral properties of the herb.
- Contraindications. Most of these are related to the temperature of the herb or to its digestibility. Warm herbs are contraindicated when heat signs are present, and cooling when cold signs predominate. Refer to Table 4.2 for more details about signs of heat and cold. the contraindication refers to the use of the herb alone. Sometimes the contraindications can be overcome by including other herbs in a formula to balance the overall effect. this is a common practice in traditional Chinese formulas, but proceed with caution if you are self-prescribing herbs. Be on the lookout for signs of worsening of your condition that might come from taking a contraindicated herb, and stop taking it promptly. Please refer back to my comments on self-medication in the Introduction.
- Dose. Dosages are given in grams. This may be confusing because most herbs are sold per ounce or per pound, and most people do not have gram scales available. A postage or diet scale is usually in ounce gradations. There are about 30 grams in an ounce. Try measuring an ounce on a postal or food scale, then divide in thirds to get ten grams, and then in half to get five grams. If necessary, divide further to get the gram dose you are looking for. The doses are for daily use, so if you are taking herbs twice a day, cut the dose in half. If you are self-prescribing tonic herbs, use the minimum doses. If you are making a formula of several herbs, include the normal dose for each herb, rather than reducing the dose because it is in a formula. A typical total dose of combined Chinese herbs for making teas with many herbs can be several ounces. For eleuthero root, the dose for tincture in milliliters. There are eight milliliters in a ounce bottle of tincture, the size usually available in health food stores.
- And the end of the listings, I sometimes mention company products that include the herb. Please don't take these as exclusive endorsements. Many excellent tonic products are available, and it is beyond the scope of this book to describe them all. I tell where to order the products in Chapter Nineteen.

Asian ginseng, Chinese ginseng, Korean ginseng

Botanical name: *Panax ginseng*

Chinese name: *ren shen*

Primary action: *chi* tonic

Secondary actions: yin and blood tonic, sedative

Organs affected: Spleen, Lung, Heart

Temperature: slightly warm

Contraindications: heat signs, high blood pressure

Note: processed red ginseng is more heating, and is a yang tonic instead of a yin tonic.

Dose: 1-9 grams

I covered the Chinese use of ginseng in detail in Chapter Six. This is the most versatile and highly valued of the tonic family. It is unparalleled as a tonic to the overall *chi*, strengthens the *chi* and blood-building organs (Spleen and Lung), and also benefits the yin. Ginseng is calming to the Heart, which in the Chinese system is responsible for such symptoms as anxiety, palpitations, insomnia, excessive dreaming, and mental unrest.

Ginseng is available as whole roots in Chinese stores or through mail order. See the chapters in Section Six on grades of ginseng and how to buy them.

In China, a common way to take whole roots is to make a tea or alcohol extract along with jujube dates. I'll explain details of how to do this in Chapter Fifteen. Some possible combinations

ginseng and jujube dates

ginseng and astragalus

ginseng with atractylodes, poria, and licorice

A wide variety of ginseng products — powders, tablets, capsules, liquid extracts, teas — are available in health food stores, drug stores, and supermarkets. Their quality is highly variable (see “ginseng scams” in Chapter Seventeen). A common Chinese liquid product is called Ginseng Extractum. It's available in Chinese stores or through East Earth Tradewinds.

Another common product in China, often available in health food stores in the U.S., is Ren Shen Feng Wang Jiang. Sometimes the name is run together: Renshenfengwangjiang. This is a combination of ginseng and royal jelly, in liquid form, packaged in small vials. If you can't find it in a store, you can order under the Chinese name from East Earth Tradewinds or as Ginseng/Royal jelly from the Institute for Traditional Medicine. K'an herbals carries the Plum flower brand from China, made with high grade herbs and containing no chemical preservatives or sugars, under the name Imperial Ginseng and Royal Jelly.

The American companies I list in Chapter Nineteen all make ginseng products that are in general superior to Chinese products, because they use higher-grade starting material. Below are some excellent products:

Jade Chinese Herbals

These products are made by one of the most reputable companies in the Chinese herbal business. Their product Heavenly Ginsengs contains the highest grades of ginseng available, including a tiny amount of genuine wild Chinese ginseng, which can cost tens of thousands of dollars per root. It also includes yi-sun ginseng, a cultivated variety that closely resemble wild ginseng. Their Nine ginsengs combines good quality ginseng with tienchi ginseng and other tonic herbs in the “seng” family. They also make a simple ginseng extract.

Dragon eggs

This product line includes a number of tonic herb formulas and single herbs. Four Ginsengs, Sage’s Ginseng, and Shiu Chu/Kirin Ginseng are all made from superior grades of ginseng. If you can’t find these in stores, they are available through East Earth Tradewinds.

Other Brands

High quality concentrated ginseng extracts are also available from GAIA Herbs, HerbPharm, and McZand Herbals

American ginseng

Botanical name: *Panax quinquefolium*

Chinese name: *xi yang shen*

Primary action: yin tonic

Secondary action: mild *chi* tonic

Organs affected: Lung, Stomach, Kidney

Temperature: cool

Contraindications: cold signs with abdominal bloating

Dose: 3-9 grams

I covered the Chinese use of American ginseng in detail in Chapter Six. I recommend that you don’t think of it as a substitute for or equivalent of Asian ginseng, but take it on its own indications. Other herbs such as codonopsis or prince ginseng are better substitutes. If you take Asian ginseng regularly, you might consider switching to American ginseng during hot weather

the way some Chinese do. Asian ginseng is contraindicated when you are hot and sweating, but American ginseng is perfect for this.

Think of American ginseng as ginseng for people who are deficient and hot, with a racing pulse. It can help cool, calm, moisten and strengthen a run down system. It is very well suited to stressed, overworked and over overly-active American who have injured their yin function. Because it specifically strengthens the lungs, it would be a valuable addition to a formula to build athletic endurance, especially for sports played in hot weather.

Herbalist and acupuncturist Michael Tierra suggests that American ginseng is a better overall tonic for stressed-out Americans than Asian ginseng, which can create tension and nervousness. "If you ask the proprietor of a Chinese herb store which ginseng is the better tonic, they will tell you Asian ginseng," says Tierra. "If you ask them what kind *they* are taking, they will often name American ginseng." American ginseng is calming rather than stimulating. Tierra also suggests that American ginseng is better for patients with AIDS or diabetes, who often have yin deficiency with heat signs and lung problems, which match the indications for American ginseng.

American ginseng roots are available in Chinese stores or through mail order from White Crane, East Earth Tradewinds, Frontier Herbs, or Spring Wind. See Chapter Eighteen for a discussion of quality and how to buy them. American ginseng products are widely available as liquid extracts, in health food stores or through the mail. Herb Pharm and Gaia Herbs produce some excellent concentrated products. Use American ginseng in any formula that calls for both a mild chi tonic and a yin tonic. Some possible combinations are:

American ginseng with jujube dates and lycium berries

American ginseng with he shou wu

American ginseng with licorice

Deer Antler, Cornu Cervi parvum

Chinese name: *lu rong*

Primary action: yang tonic

Secondary action: *chi* and blood tonic

Organs affected: Liver, Kidney

Temperature: warming

Contraindications: heat signs

Dose: 1-2 grams as powder; 3-5 grams cooked in a double-boiler or per ounce of liquor if soaked in wine (Wine dose: 1 ounce)..

Deer antler is one of many animal substances that Chinese herbalists use. I remember my instant curiosity and amazement the first time I saw a jar of scorpions next to jars of small dried lizards and seahorses on a Chinese herbalist's shelf. Although reminiscent of the stories of witches' brews, these seemingly-strange substances have potent medicinal properties, containing the various hormones, secretions, and chemicals from the species involved. The deer shed their antlers seasonally, and the discarded antlers are collected on the forest floor.

Deer antler is one of the premier tonics in Chinese medicine, where it has as great a reputation as ginseng. It appeared in the *Divine Husbandman's Classic* in the first century A.D. It's reputation as a yang tonic is built around its power to restore sexual potency, but it is also used as a general tonic. It improves the appetite, gives deeper sleep, decreases fatigue and improves work capacity. It is sometimes prescribed for failure to thrive in children. Because it is warming, it is not taken when heat signs predominate.

Some possible combinations:

antler with ginseng or codonopsis

antler with ginseng, *dong quai*, and lycium

antler with rehmannia and/or dong quai

Antler comes in thin slices. It is available in Chinese herb shops, or by mail order from East Earth Tradewinds. It can be boiled to make a tea. A common method used in China is to soak it in wine for a few weeks.

A Chinese antler extract called pantocrin and a potent American tonic called Antler/Athletic by Jade Chinese Herbals are also available from the same sources. Antler/Athletic includes many other tonic herbs. Seven Forests brand, available from Health Concerns or the Institute for Traditional Medicine also sells a product called Antler 8, which adds other herbs to deer antler to prevent overstimulation.

Asparagus root

Botanical name: *Asparagus cochinchinensis, racemosus, officinalis*

Chinese name: *tian men dong*

Primary action: Yin tonic

Organs affected: Lung, Kidney

Temperature: cold

Contraindications: cold conditions

Dose: 6-15 grams

This member of the lily family is a major herb for treating signs of deficiency heat. It is soothing and moistening to dry and inflamed mucous membranes of the mouth, throat, and lungs.

It has a sweet flavor and a chewy texture. It may be eaten alone — break off pieces of one root and eat it the course of a day.

Some possible combinations:

asparagus with rehmannia and ginseng

asparagus with American ginseng

asparagus with lycium berries and red dates

Astragalus

Botanical name: *Astragalus membranaceus*

Chinese name: *huang chi*

Primary action: *chi* tonic, blood tonic

Organs affected: Lung, Spleen

Temperature: warm

Contraindications: heat signs

Dose: 9-30 grams

Astragalus, which appeared in the earliest book of Chinese medicine, is rapidly gaining fame in the West as an immune stimulant. To pigeonhole it as an immune herb, however, is to overlook its broader use as a tonic. It strengthens the system, especially the lungs, improves the digestion, and builds up the blood. It increases endurance and body weight in animals. Astragalus is also a significant diuretic. American varieties of astragalus are known as “locoweed” because of their overstimulating effects on cattle that eat too much of them.

In Chapter Two I explained that some of the functions of the *chi* are to protect the body against external changes in temperature, control sweating, and to maintain the immune system. Collectively called *protective chi* (*wei chi* in Chinese), this function is like the shield around the Starship Enterprise in Star Trek. When overall *chi* becomes depleted, this protective *chi* is weakened, and we become more susceptible to colds and sweat more easily. A deficiency of protective *chi* is what makes AIDS patients so susceptible to opportunistic infections, and astragalus has a demonstrated effect in strengthening AIDS patients. When a distance runner finishes a race with heat exhaustion, he or she has depleted their *chi* to the point of losing regulation of sweating, and loses fluid profusely. Astragalus is like Scotty in the engine room, working feverishly to restore overall power and then circulating it to the shield before the Klingons can destroy the ship.

The Healing Power of Ginseng and the Tonic Herbs

Astragalus, in combination with another tonic herb *ligustrum*, gained fame as a possible immune-stimulating and anti-cancer herb in scientific circles in the 1980s. In one trial with nineteen cancer patients, water extracts of astragalus restored the function of the T-cells in 90% of the patients. T-cells are the main immune cells that attack tumors. In another trial, these two herbs in a broader formula increased the survival time of cancer patients receiving chemotherapy. Unfortunately, funding for this promising research in the U.S. was dropped because any eventual product was not patentable, and the drug company could not recoup its investment. Formulas based on these two herbs are used today in AIDS clinics at the Institute for Traditional Medicine in Portland, Oregon, and the Qwan Yin Clinic in San Francisco.

A similar commercial formula, called Astra-8, is produced by the Health Concerns company in Oakland, California. When I attended the National College of Naturopathic Medicine, in Portland, Oregon, Astra-8 formula was routinely given to AIDS patient in our clinic. A related product, Astraisatis, was later used in the Healing AIDS Research Project at Bastyr University in Seattle, Washington. That study, conducted on early-stage AIDS patient, showed that a combination of natural therapies helped delay the progression of AIDS.

Astra-8

Astragalus	<i>chi</i> tonic
Ligustrum	yin tonic
Ganoderma	<i>chi</i> and blood tonic
Eleuthero root	<i>chi</i> tonic
Codonopsis	<i>chi</i> tonic
Schizandra	yin and yang tonic, restrains sweating
Licorice	<i>chi</i> tonic, adjuvant
Oryza	astringent, restrains sweating
malt sugar	<i>chi</i> tonic

As a general tonic, herbalist Ron Teegarden suggests that astragalus is superior to ginseng for people under forty. It is also beneficial if you work or play for long periods outdoors and exposed to cold wind. It has no known toxicity, but can cause discomfort if you take it alone when you have heat signs. I did so on several occasions before I learned my lesson. Each time I soon felt ill at ease. A mild rash broke out on my legs, and my eyes got red and began to itch. I'm sure if had taken much more of it, and I were a cow, I would have started bellowing and initiated a stampede. The commercial formulas I mention here contain balancing herbs to reduce this possible effect. It is available as a long yellow-colored sliced root in Chinese stores or by mail order from East Earth tradewinds. Simmer the root for about a half an hour to make a tea.

Because its main benefits are to the protective *chi*, astragalus is often combined with another more general *chi* tonic in formulas. Some possible combinations:

astragalus with ginseng

astragalus with atractylodes

astragalus with angelica

astragalus with he shou wu and licorice

It is also widely available in health foods stores as encapsulated powders, teas, and tinctures. A Chinese pure astragalus product called Extractum Astragali is available in Chinese stores or by mail from East Earth Tradewinds. An excellent astragalus formula is Shield Chi, made by Jade Chinese Herbals.

The Ginseng and Astragalus formula from Zand Herbals is available in health food stores or by mail order.

Atractylodes

Botanical name: *Atractylodes macrocephala*

Chinese name: *bai zhu*

Primary action: *chi* tonic

Organs affected: Spleen, Stomach

Temperature: warm

Contraindications: heat signs

Dose: 4-9 grams

This herb has a reputation as the best of the tonics for Spleen *chi*. While many tonics benefit the Spleen function, atractylodes is most appropriate when such symptoms as diarrhea, vomiting, and lack of appetite accompany fatigue. It is an excellent overall tonic, increasing the body weight and improving endurance, and restraining excessive sweating. Atractylodes is diuretic, and is used in China for edema that accompanies Spleen *chi* deficiency. Atractylodes is one of the herbs in the Four Gentlemen formula, the most famous *chi* tonic formula in Chinese medicine (See Ginseng in this chapter). Chinese herbalist Ron Teegarden says that atractylodes is an important herb for use in a weight loss program. Its benefits in weight loss are due to normalization of the appetite and loss of water weight through its diuretic effects.

Atractylodes macrocephala (bai zhu) should not be confused with *Atractylodes lancea (cang zhu)* which has many opposite effects. the latter herb is contraindicated in *chi* deficiency with excessive sweating, a condition that atractylodes macrocephala is used to treat.

Atractylodes is available in bulk in Chinese stores or by mail order. It is found as an ingredient in many commercial tonic formulas. It comes in bulk as T or L-shaped root slices.

Some possible combinations:

atractylodes and orange peel

atractylodes and licorice

Codonopsis

Botanical name: *Codonopsis pilosula*

Chinese name: *dang shen*

Primary effect: *chi* tonic

Secondary effect: yin tonic

Organs affected: Spleen, Lung

Temperature: neutral or slightly warm

Contraindications: none noted in Chinese literature

Dosage: 3-9 grams

Codonopsis is so similar to ginseng in its action that it is substituted for the more expensive ginseng in most formulas in medical practice in China today. Its price is about a tenth that of ginseng. It is not as strong or long-lasting in its effects as ginseng, and a double-sized dose of codonopsis replaces ginseng in formulas. The only situation where it is not substituted is in cases of serious life-threatening shock or other severe illness. According to Dan Bensky, who holds both Chinese and Osteopathic medical degrees, and co-authored the two most famous Chinese herbal reference texts in the U.S., codonopsis is even considered superior to ginseng as a tonic to Spleen and Lung function. Codonopsis is not in the same botanical family as ginseng, but like ginseng, eleuthero root, and several other tonics, it contains saponin constituents. It is safer for general use than ginseng, because it does not have the tendency to generate heat with long term use.

Codonopsis is superior to American ginseng as a ginseng substitute, and much cheaper than the American variety, which is more expensive than even Asian ginseng. Its superiority is clear from the history of Chinese medicine. Both codonopsis and American ginseng were introduced into Chinese medical practice during the eighteenth century — codonopsis through discovery at home, and American ginseng through export. The Chinese were at first excited about American ginseng because it looks so much like their native variety. It was soon found to have very different properties, however, and was quickly assigned its own separate place in the Chinese materia medica. Codonopsis, on the other hand, quickly became a ginseng substitute, and is used today more frequently than the rarer Asian ginseng in medical practice. Like Asian ginseng, codonopsis has secondary blood-tonifying properties, and is often included in formulas for anemia.

The Healing Power of Ginseng and the Tonic Herbs

Chinese research has shown that codonopsis has immune stimulating properties. It also raises the metabolism, decreases respiratory rate, and increases red blood cell counts.

Ginseng

sweet, slightly bitter

Warm

strengthens Spleen function

benefits *chi* through Lungs

benefits yin, generates fluids

powerful tonic to *chi*

builds to blood

strengthens Stomach

benefits Heart *chi*

sedative effect

Codonopsis

sweet

neutral or slightly warm

strengthens Spleen function

benefits *chi* through Lungs

benefits yin, generates fluids

mild tonic to *chi*

builds the blood

Codonopsis is never used alone in China. Combine it with other *chi* or blood tonics, or with warming adjuvant herbs.

codonopsis with atractylodes

codonopsis with astragalus and jujube dates

Codonopsis with dong quai and licorice

codonopsis with ginger

Codonopsis is a common ingredient in herbal soup mixes available at Chinese herb stores. I ask for “herbal soup” mix, or “chicken soup” mix. The mixes come in packages to be cooked along with a pot of chicken soup. I make them up when I am feeling temporarily depleted from stress, or when the seasons change and I am susceptible to catch cold. I make either chicken soup or lamb stew. Cook until the meat is done. You can also make up your own from herbs purchased separately in Chinese stores or through mail-order.

Soup mix

codonopsis (or ginseng)	2 parts
Astragalus	2 parts
Dioscorea	2 parts
Lycium	2 parts
Cordyceps	1 part

Cordyceps

Botanical name: *Cordyceps sinensis*

Chinese name: *dong chong zia cao*

Primary action: tonifies both yin and yang

Organs affected: Lung, Kidney

Temperature: neutral

Contraindicated: exterior conditions

Dose: 5-12 grams

This strange-looking medicinal substance is a fungus that grows from the carcasses of the larva of various insects. It looks like a short spindly growth protruding from the body of a small dried caterpillar. As odd as it looks, this is an important tonic. One prominent Chinese herbalist of the sixteenth century stated that cordyceps was as effective as ginseng in building up a depleted system. The more commonly held view is that it is not a *chi* tonic like ginseng, but is used when a formula calls for a yang or yin tonic for Kidney function. It also tonifies depleted immune function, and is especially good for recovery from debilitating illnesses or symptoms of premature aging. Because it tonifies both yin and yang, it is safer for long-term use than the warmer yang tonics.

In China is often cooked in meat stews or with roast duck. It's available in bulk from Chinese stores or by mail order. Use a dozen pieces in a pot of stew.

Dendrobium

Botanical name: *Dendrobium nobile*

Chinese name: *shi hu*

Primary effect: yin tonic for deficiency heat

Organs affected: Lung, Kidney

Temperature: cold

Contraindications: cold or neutral conditions; abdominal distension; heavily coated tongue

Dose: 6-12 grams

This stems and leaves of this Chinese orchid are famous in China, and appeared in the earliest book of Chinese medicine. It is the premier tonic herb to clear deficiency heat with thirst and prolonged low-grade fever. It is also useful for stomach ache and/or dry heaves when heat signs are present.

According to Chinese herbalist Ron Teegarden, it is a favorite of the Taoists to build sexual energy, or to recover from sexual excesses. He suggests that it may be taken with licorice as a daily tea. In extremely large doses, this herb has caused convulsions in animals.

Dioscorea

Botanical name: *Dioscorea opposita*

Chinese name: *shan yao*

Primary actions: *chi* tonic

Secondary action: balanced yin and yang tonic

Organs affected: Spleen, Lung, Kidney

Temperature: neutral

Contraindications: excess conditions

Dose: 9-30 grams

This *chi* tonic is most often used as a secondary herb, to support other stronger tonics. Dioscorea is ubiquitous in tonic soup mixes (See codonopsis above). It is useful in any formula to treat weak digestion, weak lungs, debilitation due to stress, or to restore or build the sexual function.

dioscorea with poria for weak digestion

dioscorea with codonopsis for energy

dioscorea with antler and/or schizandra for Kidney

Common name: Dong quai

Botanical name: *Angelica sinensis*

Chinese names: *dang gui*, *tang kwei*

Primary action: Blood tonic

Secondary action: yin tonic

Organs affected: Heart, Liver, Spleen

Temperature: warm

Contraindications: heat signs, diarrhea, pregnancy

Dose: 3-15 grams

Dong quai is one of the most famous herbs in China, and is possibly the most-often used herb there. It appeared in the oldest book of Chinese medicine. Dong quai benefits a wide variety of gynecological disorders, including painful, irregular, excessive, or scanty menstruation, vaginal infection, or infertility. It is really like two herbs in one, because it both builds the blood and promotes its circulation through its warming effects. Because of these blood-circulating properties it is sometimes used after painful trauma that causes bruising. The dong quai will help to disperse the bruise. It is used the same way for the pain of arthritis. In Chinese medicine, pain is often considered a sign of either “stuck *chi*” or “congealed blood.” Chinese research has shown that dong quai has both sedative and pain-relieving properties. The warming, circulation-promoting properties make dong quai contraindicated when heat signs are present, especially deficiency heat, which it will aggravate.

According to legend, the Chinese name dang quai came from an unhappy love affair. A young, recently-married man left for the mountains to prove his manhood after being taunted by other men in the village. He arranged with his wife that if he did not return in three years she would be free to remarry. The three years passed but he did not return, and the wife reluctantly took a new husband. Soon the first husband returned, however, and both were heartbroken. Her health declined and she became weak. The former husband gave her the root of an unknown plant that he found in the mountains, and her health was restored. The Chinese characters *dang* and *gui* have three possible meanings when combined: “should come back,” “missing the husband,” and “proper order.” “Proper order” fits the medicinal action of dong quai which restores the both the blood and its proper circulation. The image of the wife, weak, pale and in poor overall health fits the picture of the ideal dong quai patient.

Dong quai is readily available in bulk in any Chinese store, or through mail-order. It comes in large, mushroom-shaped slices. It may be taken alone, in small coin-sized pieces, or brewed as a simple tea. Brew it in a container with a lid to keep in the warming volatile substances.

Some possible combinations

dong quai with astragalus

dong quai with rehmannia

dong quai with peony and lycium

dong quai with jujube dates

Dong quai is part of the Four Things Decoction, the most famous women's tonic in China. The formula, which regulates the menstrual cycle, also includes equal parts of rehmannia, peony, and ligustrum.

A popular Chinese formula, readily available in stores or through mail-order is Tan Kwei Gin (pronounced "geen"), a liquid containing about 70% dong quai, with the rest of the formula being balancing *chi* tonics and adjuvant herbs.

Eleuthero root, Siberian ginseng

Botanical names: *Eleutherococcus senticosus*, *Acanthopanax senticosus*

Chinese names: *ci wu jia*, *wu jia pi*

Primary use: *chi* tonic

Organs affected: Kidney

Temperature: warm

Contraindications: heat signs, insomnia

Dose: 5 grams - 1 ounce. Tincture 2-20 ml/day. Use lower doses in the sick or the elderly.

Eleutherococcus senticosus or eleuthero root, seems to be a plant fated to be misnamed. It is sold widely in North America as "Siberian ginseng," but it is not a ginseng at all. Scientists cannot agree on its Latin name, and its original Chinese name — *wu jia pi* — was shared with as many as thirteen other plants, many of them with entirely different properties than eleuthero root. I'll go into some length to discuss these naming problems, because eleuthero root is mistakenly thought by consumers in the U.S. to be an equivalent of Chinese and Korean ginseng, and because the confusion in Chinese names may have led to toxicity in some American products.

Eleuthero is in the same botanical family as ginseng, but this does not mean that it is ginseng. That name was devised by marketers hoping to capitalize on the popularity of true ginseng. Scientists classify plant and animals according to family, genus, and species. A human being — *Homo sapiens* — is part of the *Primate* family, the *Homo* genus, and is the *sapiens* species within that genus. True ginsengs — the *Panax* genus — are in the *Araliaceae* family. Chinese and American ginsengs are, respectively, the *ginseng* and *quinquefolium* species of *Panax*. *Eleutherococcus senticosus* is also in the *Araliaceae* family, but is not in the *Panax* genus. To clarify the relationship, a modern human — *Homo sapiens* — and a prehistoric ancestor to the human — *Homo erectus* — would have certain important similarities, being in the same genus, and certain differences, being different species. Others in the same *Primate* family but not in the *Homo* genus, including monkeys, chimpanzees, gorillas, baboons, and even tiny gibbons, have much greater difference from humans. Botanically, *Eleutherococcus senticosus*, being in the same family as *Panax ginseng* or *quinquefolium*, has some similarities to those plants, but as great a difference as that between a human and a chimpanzee. Refer to Table 13.1 to see eleuthero root's place in the Aralia family.

Scientists today do not even agree on the genus name *Eleutherococcus* for eleuthero root. Russian botanists gave its first Latin botanical name, *Hedera senticosa*, in 1856. In 1859, the Russian botanist Maximowicz removed the plant from the *Hedera* genus, named it *Eleutherococcus senticosus*, and recognized *Eleutherococcus* as a distinct genus of its own. In 1859 a German botanist combined the *Eleutherococcus* genus with the *Acanthopanax* genus, which formerly had been a subgenus of *Panax*, the genus of true ginsengs. Most botanists worldwide now call the genus *Eleutherococcus*, but Chinese scientists still call it *Acanthopanax*, and call eleuthero root *Acanthopanax senticosus*.

Table 13.1

Ginseng's botanical cousins

Some tonic plants in the Araliaceae family

Panax genus

<i>Panax ginseng</i>	Chinese or Korean ginseng
<i>Panax quinquefolium</i>	American ginseng
<i>Panax japonicus</i>	Japanese ginseng
<i>Panax pseudoginseng</i>	Tienchi ginseng

Eleutherococcus (Acanthopanax) genus

<i>Eleutherococcus senticosus</i>	eleuthero, Siberian ginseng, <i>ci wu jia</i> , <i>wu jia pi</i>
<i>Eleutherococcus gracilistylus</i>	<i>wu jia pi</i>
<i>Eleutherococcus sessiflorus</i>	<i>wu jia pi</i>

Aralia genus

<i>Aralia racemosa</i>	American spikenard
<i>Aralia californica</i>	“
<i>Aralia nudicaulis</i>	“
<i>Aralia quinquefolia</i>	“

Oplopanax genus

<i>Oplopanax horridum</i>	Devil's club
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The mystery of *wu-jia-pi*

The Chinese common name for eleuthero root is even more confusing than the Western latin names. The *Divine Husbandman's Classic* from the first century B.C. listed a plant called *wu-jia-pi* as useful for promoting energy and for curing rheumatism. It was classified in the middle category of medicines, not as a tonic. Which plant the *Classic* refers to is not clear, because at least thirteen different plants, probably including *Eleutherococcus (Acanthopanax) senticosus*, *Eleutherococcus (Acanthopanax) gracilistylus*, and *Periploca sepium*, were used in China over the centuries and all were called *wu-jia* or *wu-jia-pi*. A Chinese physician in about 500 A.D. commented that “the better *wu-jia-pi* is the five-leaved one” — probably *Eleutherococcus senticosus* which usually has five leaves. Later, in the sixteenth century, Chinese physician Li Shih-Chen repeated that the “five-leaved” *wu-jia* was the better one, and drew a picture of it, which closely resembles *Eleutherococcus senticosus*. He furthermore upgraded the classification of the herb from the middle class of herbs to the highest class — the tonics. Note that traditionally the root bark of *wu-jia-pi* plants was used in Chinese medicine, not the root.

In recent decades the Chinese have renamed the three species that commonly fall under the name *wu-jia-pi*. *Eleutherococcus senticosus* is now called *ci-wu-jia* and the whole root is specified; *Eleutherococcus gracilistylus* (root bark) is now the only plant that will be called *wu-jia-pi*; and *Periploca sepium* (root bark) is now called *xiang-jian-pi*.

Table 13.2

Chinese plants historically coming under the Classical name *wu-jia-pi*

Latin name	Modern Chinese name
<i>Eleutherococcus (Acanthopanax) senticosus</i>	ci-wu-jia
<i>Eleutherococcus (Acanthopanax) gracilistylus</i>	wu-jia-pi
<i>Periploca sepium</i>	xiang-jian-pi

This confusion of the three plants called *wu-jia-pi* in China has possibly had a negative effect on the reputation of eleuthero in China. The three were apparently used interchangeably, but the last of the species, *Periploca sepium*, has a high toxic potential, and cannot be taken for long periods. It is possible that this plant and the weaker effects of the less-powerful *Eleutherococcus gracilistylus* gave *Eleutherococcus senticosus* a bad name, and this may be one reason why eleuthero is not more widely used today in China. Substitution of periploca for eleuthero root has caused toxic reactions from products labeled as Siberian ginseng in the U.S. See the discussion on product adulteration in Chapter Seventeen. Another thing that may have hurt its reputation is that its root bark was traditionally used. It took Russian researchers in the 1950s to discover the tonic properties of the whole root.

Eleuthero and chi in Chinese medicine

Eleuthero has never held a comparable place in Chinese medicine to Chinese or American ginseng, and this reflects its weaker activity as a tonic. It is recognized as a tonic for Kidney chi — aiding in stress resistance and sexual restoration — but is not used like ginseng, or ever substituted for ginseng in China. Even after the physician Li Shih-Chen clarified the botanical identification of eleuthero and upgraded its status to that of the tonic herbs nearly 400 years ago, it never caught on as a general *chi* tonic. As a comparison, consider that when the Chinese came into contact with the American ginseng in the 1700s, a tremendous trade for it developed that continues today, even though it is not as powerful a tonic as Asian ginseng. Codonopsis also entered Chinese medicine in the 1700s, and it quickly became a ginseng substitute.

After Russian researchers claimed forty years ago that eleuthero root is a more powerful tonic than Asian ginseng, Chinese scientists took an interest in it, and entered it in the official Chinese pharmacopoeia as a tonic and adaptogen. But no trade comparable to that of American ginseng has ever developed. The Chinese still pay top dollar for good Chinese and American ginseng, which are rare in the wild and must be cultivated at great expense, even though eleuthero grows widely as a common weed. To use baseball terminology, if ginseng is “major league,” and American ginseng is “minor league,” eleutherococcus is “college ball.” It may still be a ball game, but while the majors and minors are around, baseball-lovers aren’t likely to flock to a college ball game on Saturday afternoon. Eleuthero bark is still prepared in rice wine and used, not as a tonic, but to treat arthritis. Eleuthero root is used today in some Chinese hospitals along with chemotherapy in order to reduce the toxic side effects of the cancer treatment.

A tremendous amount of research into the adaptogenic effects of eleuthero root was done in the former Soviet Union. It is widely used today in Russia as an adaptogen to increase resistance to stress, colds, and flu, and is very effective for those purposes. The Russian product is extracted in 33% alcohol.

Eleuthero root has more immediate stimulating effects than most of the tonic herbs, and this may contribute to the misconception that it is a superior tonic. It can also easily overstimulate, with symptoms such as insomnia, anxiety, and tension in the shoulders.

Eleuthero root, usually labeled Siberian Ginseng, is available in bulk, capsules, or tinctures in most health food stores and herb shops. It would be wise to prefer the tinctures, because the great volume of research into eleuthero root was performed on alcohol extracts. The HerbPharm company makes a product according to the specifications of the Russian research, then concentrates it to double strength.

Eucommia

Botanical name: *Eucommia ulmoides*

Chinese name: *du zhong*

Primary action: yang tonic

Organs affected: Kidney, Liver

Temperature: warm

Contraindications: heat signs

Dose: 6-15 grams

Eucommia is used as a yang tonic to treat sexual weakness and to strengthen the bones. It also aids in the smooth flow of *chi* and blood, and is sometimes used as an adjuvant in tonic formulas to ensure circulation. In its own right, eucommia tea has been found to have blood-pressure-lowering properties and anti-inflammatory effects. Eucommia is used in China to prevent miscarriage.

It is available in bulk in Chinese stores and through mail-order. It might be used alone as a tea for mildly elevated blood pressure. Most often it is not used alone, but is added to other yang tonic formulas to promote circulation.

Ganoderma

Botanical name: *Ganoderma lucidum*

Chinese name: *ling zhi*

Properties: *chi* tonic

Organs affected: All five major organs, depending on type

Temperature: warm

Contraindications: signs of excess

Dose: 3-9 grams

The ganoderma mushroom, sometimes called by the Japanese name *reishi* in the U.S., is an immune-stimulating sedative. It first appeared in the oldest book of Chinese medicine. This book identified six types of ling zhi by their colors — red, black, blue, yellow, white, black, and purple. Each of the types were *chi* tonics, but affected different organs systems. Although all called ling zhi, some of these are actually different species in the ganoderma genus. The two types commonly found in the U.S. are red and black. They look nothing alike, the red being more round and compact, and the black being larger and more fibrous or fleshy. The red tastes bitter, and the black more salty. The red ling zhi affects the *chi* and all the organs, but especially the Heart, giving it sedative and calming properties. The black has a stronger effect on the Kidney.

A large amount of scientific research has been conducted into ganoderma, especially in Japan. It is an immune-stimulant, building resistance to infection and tumors. It also has cardiotoxic properties, lowering serum cholesterol and increasing blood circulation through the coronary arteries. A number of clinical trials have shown it to be effective for chronic bronchitis.

Ganoderma is especially useful as a sedative for nervousness, restlessness, and insomnia that often accompanies general deficiency.

Go into any Chinese store and ask for Ling Zhi, and the proprietor will show you several products to choose from. The one I like claims to combine all six types of ganoderma. You can also buy the mushrooms in bulk from East Earth Tradewinds, Spring Garden, or Frontier Herbs, and make them into a tea. Ganoderma is a common ingredient in tonic formulas, usually added for its immune stimulating and sedative actions.

Glehnia

Botanical name: *Glehnia littoralis*

Chinese name: *bei sha shen*

Primary action: yin tonic, Lung tonic

Organs affected: Lung, Stomach

Temperature: cool

Contraindications: acute cough or cold signs

Dose: 9-15 grams

This herb is included in yin tonic formulas when dry chronic cough is a predominant symptom. It is also used for dry itchy skin. Research in China shows that it has an analgesic effect and can reduce fevers.

Glehnia is available in bulk in Chinese stores or through mail-order. It may be added to other formulas for deficient yin.

He shou wu, Fo-Ti

Botanical name: *Polygonum multiflorum*

Chinese name: *he shou wu*

Primary actions: blood and yin tonic

Organs affected: Kidney, Liver

Temperature: slightly warm

Contraindications: Spleen deficiency, excess mucous

Dose: 9 grams-1 ounce

He shou wu is one of the most famous tonics in China, used as a general tonic to postpone or reverse the effects of aging. It is named after a man in 7th century China named He. A retired farmer, too old to work the land anymore, he had to go to the forest to search for food during a famine. He returned several months later, and the villager noticed that his grey hair had begun to turn black, and that he appeared to be younger than when he left. He explained that he had been forced to eat the roots of a particular plant, which the people named in his honor. *He shou wu* means “Black haired Mr. He.” The herb first appeared in an official Chinese medical text in 713. Fo ti, the common name in the U.S., was invented by marketing concerns in the U.S. in the 1970s.

The power of this herb is demonstrated by its popularity in Japan. It was first introduced there in the early 1700s. Its use spread rapidly, and it remains today one of the most popular tonic herbs there, where it is called *kashuu*. This is one of my personal favorites as a tonic herb. I once used it with some other herbs to quickly restore me from a state of extreme exhaustion — see my story in Chapter Two — and still use it from time to time when I become run down from overwork, especially working late at night. It is used in traditional Chinese medicine for deficient blood and yin syndromes with symptoms such as insomnia, dizziness, blurred vision. It is also used for deficient Kidney syndromes such as premature grey hair, and weak lower back, knees, premature ejaculation, and infertility.

Although he shou wu is slightly warming, it is not contraindicated in conditions that are usually considered hot. In fact, it will even decrease a fever. In clinical trial, he shou wu tea and glycyrrhiza were given to seventeen patients with the recurring fever of malaria. In fifteen cases the symptoms disappeared completely. The two recurrences were successfully treated with the same formula. It has sedative and blood pressure-lowering properties. It is used by both conventional and traditional Chinese physicians to lower cholesterol. In a clinical trial, a simple tea of he shou wu was given to eighty-eight patients with high cholesterol. In seventy-eight patients the cholesterol decreased, although in eight it increased (the increase was not necessarily due to the he shou wu). In animal experiments, he shou wu enhances resistance to cold and builds the red blood cell count.

“Black Haired Mr He” comes either raw or processed. The processed form is the one available in the U.S. The roots are cooked in the broth of black beans, and acquire the

deep-brown color of the beans. The unprocessed roots have a laxative property that the processing mostly removes. In china, herbalists use the unprocessed root as a laxative, and to detoxify boils and similar accumulations. Side effects to the processed root can include increased frequency of the stool, mild abdominal pain, or a flushed face. These will usually pass in a day or two.

The roots are available in any Chinese store, or through mail order. He shou wu combines well with ginseng in equal parts and a superb general tonic. Prepare them as a tea or wine extraction (see the next chapter for details). Chinese texts caution against cooking *he shou wu* in a metal container. Some other possible combinations:

he shou wu with codonopsis

he shou wu with dong quai

he shou wu with eucommia

he shou wu with peony and ligusticum

Two popular and inexpensive Chinese products available in Chinese stores or through East Earth Tradewinds are Shou Wu Pian and Shou Wu Chih. The first is 100% he shou wu with sugar. The second, a liquid, combines he shou wu with dong quai and some other herbs. Fo-Ti Dragon Eggs, an American product, is more expensive but is much more potent.

Jujube dates, red dates

Botanical name: *Zizyphus jujuba*

Chinese names: *da zao, hong zao*

Primary actions: *chi* tonic

Secondary action: yin tonic, sedative, adjuvant to harmonize harsh herbs

Organs affected: Spleen, Stomach, Heart

Temperature: neutral

Contraindications: abdominal bloating and distension; intestinal parasites

Dose: 3-10 dates

Red dates are a common ingredient in many tonic formulas. These pleasant-tasting fruits are a *chi* and Spleen tonic in their own right, but are included in formulas as adjuvants to enhance digestion and absorption. Red dates are a natural counterpart to warming *chi* tonics like ginseng or astragalus, and are of benefit in any yang tonic formula. They also moisten a dried-out system, and have a sedative effect. Red dates will be useful in any tonic formula for insomnia. Animal research shows that they will increase weight and endurance, and may have a healing and protective effect on the liver.

Red dates are available in any Chinese store or through mail-order. Fresh dates are usually available in Chinese stores, and are of higher quality than dried dates. They can be eaten alone as snacks, or cooked with foods. When my digestion is feeling a little sluggish, I like to chew on one or two dates. The usual way of taking ginseng in China is as a tea or alcohol prepared with jujube dates to improve the digestion of the ginseng.

Licorice root

Botanical name: *Glycyrrhiza uralensis*, *Glycyrrhiza glabra*

Chinese name: *gan cao*

Primary actions; *chi* tonic

Organs affected: Primarily Spleen and Lung; all twelve organs to some extent.

Temperature: neutral (honey-fried licorice is warming)

Contraindications: nausea, heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, pregnancy, edema (honey-fried licorice: heat signs)

Dose: 3-12 grams

Licorice is famous in the West as a candy, but most licorice candy is made from anise flavorings rather than from real licorice. This herb, which was placed in the superior class of herbs in the oldest book of Chinese medicine, is used more than any other herb in Chinese formulas. It is probably the most versatile herb in either Eastern or Western pharmacopoeias, and can benefit respiratory illnesses, digestive problems, menstrual disorders, inflammatory conditions, auto-immune diseases, and chronic liver disease. In Chinese medicine it is said to affect all the meridians and organ systems, and this is its value in a tonic formula — it can guide the *chi* into all the systems. It also moderates the side effects of strong herbs.

Research has shown that licorice by itself can treat a wide variety of diseases.

- It strengthens the digestion, and has cleared ulcers in 80% of patients in clinical trials.
- It is an expectorant for the lungs, and research shows that it is as effective as codeine as a cough suppressant.
- It has a mild estrogenic effect, and is used in many Western gynecological formulas.
- Glycyrrhizin, the principal active constituent of licorice, used by conventional physicians in Japan to treat chronic hepatitis. Licorice in Chinese clinical trials cleared up 70% of cases of chronic hepatitis after two to three months of treatment.
- In AIDS patients, licorice can restore normal liver function.
- It has anti-allergy effects similar to cortisone, although not as strong. When taken with cortisone, it increases its effect and duration.
- It can be of benefit in bronchial asthma.

Licorice root can cause side effects when taken in large doses and for long periods. It stimulates the adrenal glands and adds to the effect of steroid hormones, and the effect it to cause high blood pressure, edema, headache, and potassium loss. These effects were first observed in people who ate large amounts of concentrated licorice extracts in candy. Later they were observed in the long term clinical use of licorice for the treatment of ulcers and hepatitis. They do not appear with normal use in tonic formulas.

Honey-fried licorice has somewhat different properties than raw licorice. It is more heating, and has stronger *chi*-tonic properties. It is not available this way commercially, but you can make it yourself. Warm a moderate amount of honey in a skillet until it turns brownish color. Then add some water to moisten it and stir-fry the licorice in it until it has absorbed enough honey to turn a darker color. I once experienced the heating effect of this form in a dramatic way. I was eating small pieces of American ginseng and honey-fried licorice while working on a grueling writing project. After four or five days, I had extreme heat signs — racing pulse, flushed face, and insomnia. I first thought it was due to the American ginseng, but when I later took the ginseng without the licorice, no such signs appeared. I am prone to deficiency heat, and should have known better. During this same period I met a friend at a dance, and gave her a jar of honey-fried licorice as a present. She is also prone to deficiency heat, and was hot from dancing. She ate a piece of the licorice, and within five minutes felt so hot that she had to sit down.

Licorice is readily available in Chinese stores, health food stores, herb shops, or through the mail. I prefer the Chinese licorice because it comes in small angular slices that are easy to use, although Western forms are as effective. You can chew the Chinese slices like candy, which I do for a dry cough, and they are easy to honey-fry.

Licorice is a member of the famous Four Gentlemen tonic formula, which also includes codonopsis, atractylodes, and poria. It is a valuable addition to any tonic formula. Try a tea of

ginseng and licorice in equal parts. A wonderful and very inexpensive tonic is equal parts of codonopsis and licorice.

Ligustrum, Privet

Botanical name: *Ligustrum lucidum*

Chinese name: *nu zhen zi*

Primary use: yin tonic

Organs affected: Liver, Kidney

Temperature: neutral

Contraindications: deficient yang; diarrhea with cold signs

Dose: 5-15 grams

This herb is not used alone, but is included in formulas for deficient yin when Kidney deficiency is predominant. Symptoms might include premature grey hair, dizziness, blurry vision, low back pain, weak legs and knees, and tinnitus. Lycium berries are superior as a tonic for general deficiency of yin or yang.

Ligustrum has gained fame in Western research as part of a formula with astragalus. Astragalus-ligustrum combinations have been used successfully to treat cancer and AIDS. See the discussion under astragalus.

Ligustrum is rarely available in health food stores, but can be found in Chinese stores or by mail through East Earth Tradewinds.

Lycium berries

Botanical name: *Lycium chinensis*

Chinese name: *gao chi zhi*

Primary use: blood and yin tonic

Organs affected: Liver, Kidney

Temperature: neutral

Contraindications: abdominal bloating, inflammatory conditions

Dose: 6-15 grams

These fruits, which resemble small red currants, are common in Chinese herb formulas. Besides nourishing the blood and yin, they are useful for Kidney deficiency, with such symptoms as lower back pain, weak knees, sexual weakness, dizziness and blurred vision. They are also used in Chinese hospitals for high blood pressure.

They are available in Chinese stores or through East Earth Tradewinds. Some possible combinations:

lycium and ginseng

lycium and codonopsis

lycium and rehmannia

lycium and schizandra

They may also be nibbled as snacks or used in cooking. I like to put a handful on top of a pot of just-cooked basmati rice. Cover and let them steam for a while. Then stir them in. This makes a delicious and colorful and health-building rice dish.

Morindae

Botanical name: *Morinda officinalis*

Chinese name: *ba ji tian*

Primary action: yang tonic

Organs affected: Liver, Kidney

Temperature: warm

Contraindications: deficiency heat

Dose: 5-15 grams

Although this herb appeared in the oldest book of Chinese medicine, it is not used alone. It is included in yang and blood tonic formulas when cold signs are present and Kidney symptoms predominate. It strengthens the muscles and bones. You'll find it in Chinese stores or by mail order through East Earth Tradewinds. It combines well with eucommia, dong quai, rehmannia, or lycium.

Peony

Botanical name: *Paeonia lactiflora*

Chinese name: *bai shao*

Primary action: blood and yin tonic

Organs affected: Liver, Spleen

Temperature: cold

Contraindicated: diarrhea with cold signs

Dose: 6-15 grams

Peony root is an important women's tonic in Chinese medicine. It is closely related medicinally to asparagus root. Although having entirely different textures, they both have significant amounts of the same constituent, *asparagine*. This is a primary tonic herb for menstrual cramps and other menstrual disorders. It is often used in place of dong quai, which is warming, when heat signs are present. It has antispasmodic properties which help all kinds of cramps and spasms. It is a valuable addition to *chi* tonic formulas, which can cause tension, because it relieves the tension. It is also used to allay night sweats in patients who have deficient yin. Chinese research shows that it lowers blood pressure.

Peony one of the members of the Four Things Decoction, the most famous women's tonic in China, which also includes dong quai, rehmannia, and ligusticum.

It is available in bulk in Chinese stores and through the mail from East Earth Tradewinds or Frontier Herbs. Some possible combinations:

peony with licorice

peony with dong quai

peony with rehmannia

Poria

Botanical name: *Poria cocos*

Chinese name: *fu ling*

Primary action: *chi* tonic, especially Spleen *chi*, sedative

Organs affected: Spleen, Heart, Lung

Spleen tonic, sedative

Temperature: neutral

Contraindications: frequent urination with cold signs

Dose: 9-15 grams

This plant is a white round fungus that grows underground on the roots of conifer trees. It was known in turn-of-the-century Western herbalism as “tuckahoe,” named for the hoe that is necessary to dig it up from the tree roots. The main action of poria is on the Spleen. It drains accumulated moisture in the upper digestive tract and relieves abdominal bloating. It is included in many *chi* or blood tonic formulas which can have a tendency to promote abdominal bloating. It is a strong diuretic and a first-class sedative, proving relief for insomnia and anxiety. Chinese research shows that it will lower blood pressure and blood sugar.

Poria is available in bulk in Chinese stores or through the mail from East Earth Tradewinds or Frontier Herbs. It is a member of the famous Four Gentlemen tonic formula, which also includes ginseng (or codonopsis), *Atractylodes*, and licorice.

Prince Ginseng

Botanical name: *Pseudostellaria heterophylla*

Chinese names: *hai er shen, tai zi shen*

Primary actions; *chi* tonic

Secondary action: yin tonic

Organs affected: Spleen, Lung, Heart

Temperature: neutral

Contraindications: none noted

Dose: 6-15 grams

Although prince ginseng is not related to Asian ginseng botanically, it is very similar in its action, although weaker. Prince ginseng roots look like tiny ginseng roots. It is milder than codonopsis, but is a worthy substitute for ginseng for those for whom ginseng or codonopsis are too stimulating. Prince ginseng in combination with schizandra was found effective in Chinese clinical trials for nervous exhaustion.

Prince ginseng is available in Chinese stores or from East Earth Tradewinds by mail. It costs about \$16 a pound, about a tenth the cost of ginseng. Use it like ginseng in a tea with jujube dates, or combine it with schizandra berries. Prince ginseng is sometimes found as a component in tonic formulas found in health food stores.

Rehmannia

Botanical name: *Rehmannia glutinosa*

Chinese names: *shi di huang, di huang*

Primary uses: blood and yin tonic

Organs affected: Liver, Kidney, Heart

Temperature: slightly warm

Contraindications: weak digestion, abdominal bloating, excess phlegm, pain from stuck *chi*

Dose: 9 grams to 1 ounce

Rehmannia appeared in the oldest book of Chinese medicine, and remains a famous women's tonic today. It is a primary herb in formulas to tonify blood and yin deficiency, with symptoms such as paleness, dizziness, palpitations, insomnia, and menstrual dysfunction. It is also the principal herb treating deficient yin when Kidney symptoms are predominant, such as night sweats, low back pain, infertility, sexual weakness, and slow healing of bones or flesh. It is especially important in treating wasting diseases, such as diabetes.

Rehmannia can lower blood pressure. In a Chinese clinical trial, sixty-two patients with high blood pressure and no contraindications for rehmannia took it for two weeks. Both blood pressure and serum cholesterol fell.

Rehmannia can be hard to digest, and overuse can lead to abdominal bloating and diarrhea. Initial temporary side effects such as mild diarrhea, abdominal pain, dizziness, or low energy will usually disappear with continued use.

Rehmannia comes as either raw root or in a prepared, steamed form. Both have the same tonic properties. The steamed roots are black and have warming properties, while the raw root is cooling, and is sometimes preferred in China during hot weather. Prepared roots are most common in this country, but raw roots can be obtained by mail-order from Frontier Herbs.

Rehmannia is one of the herbs in the Four Things Decoction, the most famous women's tonic in China. The other herbs are dong quai, peony, and ligusticum. Rehmannia combines well with dong quai or asparagus root as a simple tea.

One way to prepare rehmannia is to soak it in wine for three weeks. Add a little fennel seed or cardamom to promote digestion. Take doses of a wine glass a day. Wine itself is considered to promote circulation in Chinese medicine.

Rehmannia is a common ingredient in Chinese products. One popular one is Women's Precious Pills, available in Chinese stores or through East Earth Tradewinds. K'an herbals sells an excellent variation of this product, manufactured from high quality herbs, and including ginseng in the place of the codonopsis in the original formula. Another Chinese product featuring rehmannia is Chih Pai Di Huang Wan, which also contains cooling herbs for hot flashes in menopause.

Royal jelly

Chinese name: *feng wang jiang*

Principal use: *chi* and blood tonic

Organs affected: Liver and Spleen

Temperature: neutral

Contraindications: excess conditions

In a beehive, the worker bees produce a glandular secretion from honey known as *royal jelly*. This makes up the total diet of the queen bee of the hive. It must be a superb diet because the queen lives for five to six years, while the workers only live four to five months. Royal jelly, a *chi* and blood tonic, is not a traditional Chinese medicine, being only recently discovered. However, it is very popular in China, mixed with other tonics in the form of patent medicines.

These patents are a very common sight in North American health food stores. I already discussed *Ren Shen Feng Wang Jiang* — ginseng and royal jelly — under Asian ginseng. Other common products are *Ling Zhi Feng Wang Jiang* — ganoderma mushroom with royal jelly, codonopsis, and lycium berries — and *Feng Ru Jiang* — royal jelly with codonopsis and astragalus. *Bei Jing Feng Wang Jiang* contains royal jelly only. All four are general tonics, but especially suited for deficient *chi*.

Schizandra berries

botanical name: *Schizandra sinensis*

Chinese name: *wu wei zi*

Principal use: tonic astringent

Organs affected: Lung, Kidney

Temperature: warm

Contraindications: heat signs, pregnancy

Dose: 6-9 grams

Schizandra, which appeared in the oldest book of Chinese medicine, is most commonly used in Chinese medicine as an astringent for such symptoms as diarrhea or excessive sweating that often accompany deficiency syndromes. It has tonic properties of its own, reducing nervous exhaustion, building the endurance, strengthening the reflexes, and increasing work efficiency. It also has sedative properties useful for insomnia due to deficiency. It is included in Chinese formulas for low energy, insomnia, diarrhea, sexual weakness, involuntary sweating, tuberculosis, asthma, and diabetes.

In a Chinese clinical trial, alcohol extracts of schizandra were given to seventy-three patients suffering from neurasthenia (nervous exhaustion). Forty three patients were cured, and thirteen significantly improved.

If taken alone and in high doses, schizandra can cause restlessness and insomnia. It also contains bitter substances called tannins. These are probably partly responsible for its astringent properties. For tonic use, I soak the berries for a few hours to reduce the bitterness, drain the water, and then dry them again. The soaked berries can be further allowed to soak in wine for several weeks, for an excellent tonic for the Kidney.

Schizandra is available in bulk in Chinese stores, or through the mail from East Earth Tradewinds or Frontier Herbs. it is not usually used alone. Some possible combinations:

schizandra with codonopsis

schizandra with astragalus

schizandra with lycium berries and licorice

schizandra with rehmannia

Tienchi ginseng, Sanchi ginseng

Botanical name: *Panax pseudoginseng*

Chinese names: *tienchi, sanchi*

Primary uses: trauma medicine

Secondary use: *chi* tonic

Organs affected: Liver, Stomach, Large Intestine

Temperature: warm

Contraindications: pregnancy, caution in deficient blood

Dose: 1-3 grams of powder; 3-9 grams of root for tea.

A preparation of this close relative of ginseng was standard issue to North Vietnamese troops during the Vietnam War. Although soldiers in Asia have from time to time used Asian ginseng to increase endurance during combat, this herb was used for a very different purpose. It reduces bleeding. The soldiers used it as first aid for gunshot wounds until they could receive medical attention. It is also used in Chinese hospitals for serious bleeding in the gastrointestinal tract, the lungs, or from the nose.

I first became aware of tienchi when I tore some ligaments in my shoulder while playing basketball. Over the course of two days, an ugly bruise from internal bleeding spread from my shoulder all the way down to my elbow. My acupuncturist gave me some tienchi ginseng, in a powdered form, and the internal bleeding promptly stopped, the pain improved, and the bruise resolved quickly. Tienchi is also used for sprains, strains, and for painful menstruation and other kinds of external or internal bleeding when the blood is congealed into bruises.

Tienchi is used in China for heart attack patients and others with coronary artery disease. Clinical trials there show that it increases the blood flow through the coronary arteries and lowers cholesterol.

Tienchi contains some of the same constituents as its close relative ginseng, and is sometimes used as a general tonic as well. In a clinical trial, it was given along with chemotherapy for cancer, and improved the success of that treatment. Tienchi increases the efficiency of circulatory function in athletes. In trials with weight lifters and swimmers, it was found to lower maximum heart rates and hasten the return to a normal pulse after exercise. It might be a preferred tonic for athletes in contact sports, because it both increases efficiency and helps resolve bruises and swellings.

Tienchi is available in bulk powdered, sliced, or in whole roots from Spring wind. Whole roots are also available from East Earth Tradewinds and from some Chinese stores. The prepared

medicine I took for my torn shoulder is called Yunnan Paiyao. It comes as a powder in small vials, with a red pill on top of the bottle, or as capsules. The pill is only for cases of severe bleeding and traumatic shock, not for normal athletic trauma. For external bleeding the powder can be sprinkled directly in a wound, or taken in water. For strains, sprains, bruises, or gynecological bleeding, take it with some wine. Yunnan Paiyao is available in any Chinese store, or through East Earth Tradewinds or the Institute for Traditional Medicine. It is an excellent addition to a first aid kit.

Adjuvant herbs: movers and shakers

Several herbs that are not themselves tonics are often found in tonic formulas. They are added in order to improve the digestion and to promote circulation of the *chi* and blood generated by the tonic herbs. Most are warming in nature, and are circulatory stimulants. Remember that poor digestion often accompanies deficiency syndromes, and that one of the major disorders of *chi* is stuck *chi* that does not flow properly. These *adjuvant* herbs help to solve both problems. Licorice and/or jujube dates, which I've covered in their own sections in this chapter, are added to many tonic formulas both as adjuvant digestion-promoting herbs, and as minor tonics in their own right. Some others are listed below:

Citrus peel (*chen pi*)

These are the dried peels of Chinese species of oranges or tangerines. Citrus peel is both warming and bitter. It aids in digestion and promotes circulation of *chi*. Citrus peel is readily available in Chinese stores, and orange peel, its equivalent, is available in Western herb stores.

Ginger root (*sheng chiang*)

Dried ginger root is a powerful warming digestive herb. It has strong anti-nausea properties, and has been found in clinical trials to be as effective for nausea as the conventional drug dramamine, which is often prescribed for motion sickness. Other trials have shown that it can reduce or eliminate the nausea that accompanies chemotherapy. Ginger may be included in tonic formulas when poor digestion and cold signs predominate. A classic *chi* and blood tonic formula from Chinese medicine uses both ginger and citrus peel:

he shou wu	2-3 parts	blood and yin tonic
Ginseng	2 parts	<i>chi</i> tonic
	(or codonopsis, 4 parts)	
dong quai	1 part	blood tonic

citrus peel	1 part	adjuvant
dried ginger	1 part	adjuvant

Ligusticum (*chuan xiong*)

Ligusticum is an acrid herb that promotes circulation of both blood and *chi*. It is often combined with blood tonics to promote circulation. It is a part of the Four Things Decoction, the most famous blood tonic formula in Chinese medicine (See Dong quai) where it is included as an adjuvant to the three tonic herbs in the formula.

Bupleurum (*chai-hu*)

Bupleurum is considered a liver herb in Chinese medicine, but remember that the Chinese concept of Liver includes the regulation of the flow of blood, *chi*, and emotions. The syndrome of *stuck liver chi*, which is very common in Westerners, includes feelings of anger and frustration. Bupleurum, a cooling herb, is sometimes added to strong tonic formulas, such as those for athletes, in order to ensure that the generated *chi* moves harmoniously and to counteract metabolic heat generated by the tonic herbs.

The Healing Power of Ginseng and the Tonic Herbs