

Herbs for Calming the Mind and Strengthening the Heart

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How to Move Like a Gardener: Planting and Preparing Medicines from Plants
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FOUR PILLARS OF HEALTH

1. Living in rhythm with seasonal, solar and lunar cycles. Daily connection with nature.
2. Self-awareness and nourishing practices such as meditation, yoga, chi gong, walking, hiking, prayer, journaling, gardening, singing, playing and listening to music. Reflective and creative ways to express oneself.
3. Diet. Nutritive herbs and foods. Relaxing herbal teas.
4. Flower essences, healing baths, and cleansing herbs to keep our minds, hearts and energetic body calm, harmonious and in balance. Heart breathing.

Chinese medicine practitioners believe that *shen* (spirit, consciousness) is stored in the Heart. Disturbed *shen* can cause symptoms such as agitation, anxiety, palpitations, insomnia and impaired memory.

SACRED BASIL, HOLY BASIL *Ocimum sanctum* *Lamiaceae Family*

Flavor and thermal nature: pungent, bitter, warming, dry

Part used: leaf and flower

Actions: adaptogen, aromatic, carminative, diaphoretic, expectorant, relaxing nervine. Imparts Sattva qualities of harmony and spiritual clarity. Opens the heart and mind. Helps create a feeling of compassion and devotion.

In Ayurveda, Tulsi or Tulasī is said to embody the nature of pure consciousness (Sattva). *Sattvic properties include pure light, righteous action, creativity and the power of observation. Sattva gives the power of discrimination, knowledge and the ability to know truth. The highest state of sattva manifests as peace, harmony, contentment, compassion, unconditional love, selflessness, devotion and faith. Sattva is also the state of equilibrium. When Sattva prevails, there is peace and tranquility. (Tulasi Devi: Goddess of Devotion, pg 19)*

Calms the mind and deepens meditation practice. Opens the heart and mind. Sacred basil helps foster a feeling of compassion and devotion.

Strengthens the mind and body. Improves memory and clarity.

Increases prana and ojas. Enhances the body and mind's ability to be more resilient and adaptable to physical, emotional and spiritual stress.

Lowers cortisol levels. Eases anxiety, mild depression and insomnia.

Removes excess mucus in the respiratory tract and nasal passages, increasing prana (vital life force) and circulation. Clears coughs, colds, sore throats, sinus congestion and fevers.

Promotes good digestion, clears toxins from the gut and relieves pain and spasm in the gut. Removes excess stress in the colon (excess vata) which in turn increases nutrient absorption and strengthens the nervous system.

Repairs damage to DNA from over exposure to radiation. Our cells absorb and store the cumulative destabilizing inflammatory effects of radiation. At a certain point, the DNA becomes so weary from absorbing the repeated blows that it collapses. The collapse of the intelligence of DNA diminishes the health of our cells and our body.

Growing Tulsi in pots at the entrance to our homes and workplaces is helpful in clearing negative energy and offering inspiration and harmony to our hearts and homes.

Safety considerations: Avoid during pregnancy.

GOTU KOLA *Centella asiatica* *Hydrocotyle asiatica* *Apiaceae* Family

Flavor and thermal nature: bitter, slightly sweet, cooling

Part used: leaf, aerial parts

Actions: alterative, anti-inflammatory, anxiolytic, memory tonic, nervine, rejuvenative, vulnerary. Sattvic (the quality of nature reflected in compassion, harmony, inner peace)

A few drops of fresh tincture can be taken before meditation to help quiet the mind and cultivate a harmonious and compassionate state of being.

Calms and relaxes the central nervous system. Strengthens the mind. Reduces anxiety, depression and insomnia. Enhances concentration and alertness, improves memory and relaxes the brain when over-stimulated or chaotic.

Fresh leaves can be slowly infused in coconut oil (double extraction) or in ghee for restoring cerebral function-use orally and massage the head.

Improves integrity of capillaries, making it useful for eyes, venous insufficiency, spider veins, varicose veins, and anal fissures-combine with hawthorn for strengthening capillaries and veins.

Ayurvedic practitioners suggest using gotu kola for people with behavioral and developmental difficulties such as autism, Asperger's and ADHD.

Use orally and topically for various skin conditions such as eczema, psoriasis, acne, hives, burns, radiation burns. Gotu kola stimulates microcirculation and healing to tissues that have been traumatized. Use fresh leaves prepared in coconut oil or juice of fresh leaves mixed with turmeric and applied to wounds to speed healing. (Anne McIntyre)

Safety considerations: Extra care during pregnancy. Anne McIntyre cautions use of gotu kola for people using CNS depressants (alcohol, opiates, benzodiazepines, anaesthetics, tricyclic anti-depressants, anti-epileptic medications) Avoid oral use if taking insulin/hypoglycemic and cholesterol lowering medications or barbituates. (Pole, 2006, p. 188)

HAWTHORN *Craetagus* spp. *Rosaceae* Family

Flavor and thermal nature: Slightly warm, flowers are sweet and bitter berries are sour

Parts used: Flower, leaf and berry

Actions: Anti-inflammatory, astringent, cardiac tonic, coronary and peripheral vasodilator, cardio-vascular and circulatory tonic, diuretic, hypotensive, relaxant, rejuvenative.

Nourishes heart muscle, improves heart muscle function, increases diameter of coronary artery, beneficial for people with "ADD and ADHD", stabilizes collagen, eases inflamed connective tissues and lessens heart palpitations. The Eclectic doctors used hawthorn for angina, cardiac edema, heart palpitations and valvular deficiency.

In Chinese medicine, hawthorn berries are used to improve a sour or fermented stomach. Hawthorn flowers especially help ease insomnia for people who are grieving or under lots of stress. Settles a disturbed heart.

From an Ayurvedic perspective hawthorn is rejuvenating and especially supportive for people who are high Vata or in Vata time of life (50 and over), easing nervous conditions connected with aging such as poor memory and insomnia.

Safety considerations: Work with your physician if taking digitalis drugs, anti-hypertensives or beta-blockers and you wish to use hawthorn. Hawthorn is commonly used by physicians in Europe and by some physicians in Maine.

LEMON BALM *Melissa officinalis* *Lamiaceae Family*

Flavor and thermal nature: mildly bitter, sour, sweet, pungent, cooling

Parts used: leaf and flower

In ancient Greece, Melissa was thought to strengthen the mind and students wore sprigs of Melissa in their hair while studying.

Actions: antiviral, antidepressant, antispasmodic, carminative, diaphoretic, memory aid, nervine, thyroxine inhibitor

Lemon balm calms and quiets the heart. Eases heart palpitations associated with stress. I use lemon balm glycerite and hawthorn together for reducing heart palpitations. Combine lemon balm with hawthorn and motherwort for lowering mildly elevated blood pressure.

Reduces feelings of overwhelm, fear of failure, low self-esteem and mild depression. Eases stress, anxiety and stress-induced headaches. A favorite combination of mine for stress and uplifting the Spirit: lemon balm glycerite, lavender glycerite, milky oat seed glycerite, skullcap glycerite or tincture, St Johnswort tincture.

Relieves gas, nausea, heartburn and bloating. Reduces restlessness and over-excitability, especially in children.

Research has shown that lemon balm interferes with cholinesterase, which breaks down acetylcholine. Using lemon balm to stimulate this process may help in lowering the incidence or slowing the progression of Alzheimer's (Perry N. et al, 1996, *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*: 11(12): 1063-1069).

Safety considerations: Thyroxin antagonist. Combine with bugleweed and motherwort for people with hyperthyroidism and Grave's disease. Avoid using therapeutic doses if on hypothyroid medication.

PASSIONFLOWER *Passiflora incarnata* *Passifloraceae Family*

Flavor and thermal nature: bitter, cooling

Parts used; flowers and vine. Can be grown in pots in Maine and brought inside in winter.

Actions: This herb nourishes the Heart and calms the Spirit. Eases insomnia caused by a restless mind with circulating thoughts. Helps to lessen anxiety,

agitation, and heart palpitations. Chinese herbalist Thomas Avery Garran says passionflower gives the Spirit a comfortable place to reside.

Safety considerations: Avoid during pregnancy May lessen intestinal motility. Discuss with your physician if using anticoagulants, warfarin, thyroid medications, MAO inhibitors or salicylates.

SCHISANDRA *Schisandra chinensis* *Magnoliaceae* Family

Flavor and thermal nature: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, warm, dry. The Chinese name, Wu wei zi, means "five flavors fruit."

Part used: red berries

Actions: adaptogen, astringent, hepato-protective, improves memory, eases insomnia, reduces inflammation, steadies the heart. Schisandra treats the Chinese Heart, lung and kidneys by helping one hold on to what is eternally valuable in life. When taken over several weeks or months the berries astringent and adaptogenic properties help build one's inner capacity to be less reactive and to be more inwardly resilient and physically grounded. Stops leakage of emotional energy. Treats incontinence. Protects the liver. The berries help the Kidney to grasp the chi/qi, making it possible to breath more deeply. Schisandra holds the Heart steady so one's light can shine.

Safety considerations: Avoid use during pregnancy, acute fevers, flu and pneumonia, and any acute skin condition with heat.

SOURCES FOR PLANTS AND SEEDS

Avena Botanicals: selling pots of our own biodynamic schisandra plants in 2018

Call us at 207-594-0694 to reserve your plants, to be picked up at our farm

FEDCO TREES: hawthorn trees FEDCO SEEDS: Sacred basil seeds

One Green World: schisandra plants (they mail order)

Richter's: seedlings for gotu kola, bacopa and many different medicinals

Strictly Medicinals: seeds for gotu kola, lemon balm, passionflower, Sacred basil

Information on growing and medicinally using these herbs can be found in Deb's book *How to Move Like a Gardener: Planting and Preparing Medicines from Plants*.

The world of nature speaks directly to the human heart.

-Tarthang Tulku

