

COMMON HERBS OF AYURVEDA

An Introduction with Jaisri M. Lambert © 2011

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HARIDRA:

Turmeric is warming in thermal effect, but bitter and astringent in taste and therefore reducing to Pitta and Kapha. Its action is anti-inflammatory, anti-viral and anti-fungal. It has affinity with the liver as the root of the haemo-poetic system. Turmeric has both quick action because of affinity with rasa dhatu (plasma), and sustained action because of its affinity with asthi dhatu (bone). It is useful in bacterial infection of the bone, a condition otherwise very difficult to treat. It can be useful for skin rashes, lupus and tumors, etc. It balances blood sugar due to bitter quality, which is insufficiently represented in blood sugar disturbances such as Type II Diabetes.

AMALAKI:

Amalaki is one of the three ingredients of Triphala, the famous tri-doshically balancing fruit blend. It is Indian Gooseberry, a very sour fruit, though reducing to Pitta. Amalaki is especially excellent in elimination of sour quality, a characteristic of almost all skin diseases. Amalaki is 'rasayana' or rejuvenative, which means that it repairs and restores tissue that has been previously damaged, especially by Pitta type of toxins. Amalaki has laxative action, so is best taken at bedtime (9pm or so). Fruits are to be taken separately from other foods, according to Ayurvedic tradition. Combined with equal Haritaki and Bibhitaki, Triphala rejuvenates all dhatus. Its internal use is avoided during pregnancy.

BRAHMI:

Brahmi is Centella Asiatica. It is a creeper shaped like the overview of a brain. It is cooling, rejuvenative and has affinity to 'majja dhatu', the brain and nervous systems. It also has affinity with the endocrine system and helps to chelate toxins from the connective tissue of the endocrine glands, especially from Pitta and Kapha dosha. Brahmi can be taken internally for pitta and kapha eye diseases, and for PK heart diseases. Brahmi helps restore memory, higher cognitive and neurological functions. Its use may increase Vata with prolonged use in some individuals.

MANJISTHA:

Manjistha is Red Madder Root or Rubia Cordifolia. It is cooling and astringent, and has affinity for the blood. It is often used with equal Haridra for balanced thermal effect in skin disturbances such as rashes, boils, eruptions and stagnations. It's commonly used for varicose veins, bruising, eczema, psoriasis and bleeding disorders, etc. Its bright color seen in oils such as Pinda Thailam and Mahanarayan Oil reflects the bright red color of healthy blood. Manjistha has affinity with the capillary system. Its slow action over time helps to detoxify and repair the fine structures that interface with the lymph system. It is contra-indicated in use with Coumadin.

NEEM:

Neem is a well-known antiseptic leaf from the tropical tree, Azadirachta Indica. It is anti-parasitic, anti-cancerous and anti-biotic due to its very bitter taste. Neem has affinity with the skins, which extend throughout the body as linings, according to Ayurveda. Neem also has affinity with the liver and is used in hormonal and blood

viscosity disorders. It is useful for all types of hepatitis and is very cooling. It has quick action, but can be used for sub-acute and chronic conditions. It combines well with other herbs to potentize their benefits. Because it is drying due to its astringent property, it is useful to break down cystic, fibrotic and tumorous growths, but can provoke Vata. Avoid internal use in emaciation.

JEERA:

Cumin seed is useful for everyday digestive disturbances such as gasses, bloating, post-digestive discomfort and flatulence. It is used in cooking to help release enzymes at a right time for optimum assimilation and absorption of foodstuff. In 'visham agni' condition, it can also be taken as a powdered supplement after meals on the tongue or in a homemade veggie cap, with a little warm water. Jeera is warming, pungent and has affinity for the jejunum. Cumin seed tea is an excellent alkalizer and digestive aid, and gently promotes Apana Vata. It has a mildly sedative action.

DHANYA:

Coriander is a quick-acting anti-histamine and has affinity with the skin, especially the skin of the adrenal glands. Coriander is cooling. It can be used internally to ward off allergic reactions such as anaphylaxis, hives, swelling and intense itching. Externally, it can be applied as a paste to affected areas. Sipping tea of coriander seeds can help revive the person after shock or calm an acidic stomach. Plant your coriander seeds in pots and soon you'll see your own homegrown cilantro, delicious to use daily for healthy digestion. Coriander seed tea is useful in bacterial bladder infection.

ALOE VERA:

Aloe is called 'Kumari' in Sanskrit, meaning 'maiden, or virgin'. It has affinity with Artava Dhatu, the female reproductive system. It is bitter and astringent, therefore is used traditionally to reduce pitta and kapha dosha. Aloe is used as a carrier substance for other herbs, perhaps in formulation, to reach their destination. Aloe does 'ama pachan' (metabolizing of toxins) in all tissues and helps rejuvenate all five elemental liver functions. Avoid in constipation, emaciation and pregnancy.

YASHTI MADHU:

Licorice root is sweet and nourishing. It has affinity for the adrenals, throat (especially vocal chords), bronchi and lungs. It is cooling and heavy in nature. It is a cardiac stimulant, therefore avoid licorice root in high blood pressure condition. Yashti is a natural steroidal precursor substance without side effects, useful in acute asthma attack and chronic fatigue conditions.

VIDHARI:

Vidharikand is Wild Yam, a sweet, nourishing root, often called the 'primary rejuvenator'. It is warming, anabolic and acts as a progesterone precursor. It is useful in muscle wasting or debility to help re-build strength and endurance. It is helpful to reduce Vata, but may increase Pitta and/or Kapha with longer-term use. It's helpful in anorexia, underweight and asospermia.

FENNEL:

Fennel has affinity for the stomach, is cooling and antacid, therefore alkalizing. The seeds can be used after meals as a digestive aid, helping to normalize enzyme

production in the upper G.I. tract. Though cooling, fennel is pacifying to all three doshas, though especially beneficial for Tikshna Agni. Fennel root can be eaten fresh in summer in salads, or lightly cooked with cumin and coriander seeds. It goes well with endive and celery, providing pungent, bitter and sweet tastes to the meal.

Disclaimer:

This compilation is for introductory educational purposes only and does not contain all the information needed to understand plant medicine. It is not intended to diagnose or treat any condition; please consult your physician or health care provider.

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