

Cancer-Fighting

Herbs and Roots

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8 powerful plants from Mother Nature's arsenal

Plant roots may be out of sight, but they shouldn't be out of mind when it comes to dealing with cancer. Any physical approach to healing cancer must first concentrate on restoring both the organs of elimination and the circulation of nutrients in the body. Roots are ideally suited for this task because they are often cleansing and eliminative as well as supportive and nutritive. Relative to the rest of the plant, roots have a more complex, enduring structure with a concentration of stored energy.

Two such roots ideal for restoring the liver are carrots and beets, along with apples and a little lemon. Freshly juice this combination and drink a glass each day (see article in this issue, page 32). Raw carrots provide an abundance of beta-carotene, a known cancer fighter. At the same time, carrots regulate the bowels, which are often sluggish a number of years before diagnosis of the disease. Here are other cancer-fighting herbs and roots.

1-Echinacea

When harvesting roots we often look for those that have already been in the soil for three years—as in the case of echinacea or purple coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*). Well known for its immune-enhancing abilities, echinacea activates phagocytosis (destruction of foreign organisms by white blood cells and scavenger cells called macrophages) and increases the activity of natural killer cells in cancer patients. Echinacea also detoxifies the lymphatic glands and protects against infection, a common complication in advanced cancers.

2-Dandelion

Another root with remarkable healing and preventive properties is good old dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale radix*). Dandelion is good for the liver and digestion. It purifies and nourishes the blood, stimulates bile flow, increases stomach juices and relieves constipation. Eat its leaves in salads to add valuable fibre and nutrition to the diet. A tea made from the freshly dug, unsprayed roots, or a little of the roots chewed fresh each day has kept many hale and hardy into old age (see page 100).

8-Black Seed Blessings

You may not be familiar with it yet, but black seed is as popular in its homeland of the Middle East as garlic is in the West. In fact, garlic and black seed have something in common: both are powerful immune stimulants.

Black seed (*Nigella sativa*), also known as black caraway, black cumin and “seed of blessing,” is a mild, aromatic herb that has been time-tested for more than 4,000 years. A famous Arabic physician of the 13th century, Ibn Kaym, said it could be used for more than 50 ailments, including respiratory disease, arthritis and inflammation.

Recent scientific studies have found that black

seed is also a powerful anti-tumour herb. Researchers at Florida's Panama City Clinic also noted that it stimulates the immune system's T-cells. “This effect may exert an important role in cases involving cellular immuno-deficiency, particularly in cancer and AIDS,” the study concludes.

Elsevier Scientific Publishers in Ireland also report: “It is evident that the active principle isolated from *Nigella sativa* seeds is a potent anti-tumour agent and the constituent long chain fatty acid may be the active component.”

—Editorial Staff

3-Burdock Root

Burdock root (*Arctium lappa*) is a respected medicinal herb in both Asia and the West. It is known to build the immune system, tone the liver, kidneys and lungs, purify the blood by neutralizing poisons and cleanse the lymphatic system. It also contains proven anti-cancer compounds that have shown to be active against leukemia, lymphoma and various types of tumours.

4-Valerian

One of the best roots to promote better sleeping and to eliminate some of the anxiety of a cancer patient is valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*). This natural tranquilizer does not have the undesirable side-effects and addiction associated with pharmaceuticals. Modern research has attributed valerian's cytotoxic (cancer-destroying) effects to its valepotriate constituents. You can make a tea from the dried root, cut very finely, or if you find the odour unpleasant, take three to five millilitres of tincture, three times daily.

5-Astragalus

Another cancer-fighting root is the Chinese herb astragalus (*Astragalus membranaceus*), an adaptogen (helps the body cope with stressors) that has been shown to slow down metastasis (spread of cancer cells) and to stimulate the immune system's T-cells. Astragalus also protects against the toxic effects of chemotherapy.

6-Pau d'arco

Made from the inner bark of the lapacho tree found in South America, pau d'arco (*Tabebuia spp.*) has a long folk history of use in the treatment of infections and cancer. Substances in pau d'arco's inner bark improve oxygen to better nourish cells and contain natural antibiotic and anti-tumour constituents. It can be taken internally as capsules or tea or externally as baths or compresses.

7-Calendula (English Marigold)

Calendula officinalis has a long tradition of use for cancer going back to Dioscorides (first century AD) and Matthioli (1500-1577). The petals of this plant have been used as a poultice, compress, ointment and infusion for tumours in countries as diverse as Spain, Norway, Uruguay, the Philippines, Chile, Yugoslavia and Argentina. Like many herbs, it works best when applied directly as a local treatment. However, recent evidence suggests that internal use has immunostimulant and anti-tumoural effects.

For freedom from cancer, it's never too early to give a medical herbalist or naturopath a chance to counsel you on both physical and mental strategies for optimum well-being. ■

Founding editor of the *Canadian Journal of Herbalism* and member of the *Canadian Second Expert Advisor Committee on Herbs and Botanical Preparations*, Keith Stelling was recently awarded life membership in the *College of Practitioners of Phytotherapy* (Eng). He is presently completing a book on herbal medicine.

Resources:

For more information on herbalism or for a referral to an herbalist, contact the Ontario Herbalists Association at 416-536-1509 or 1-877-OHA-HERB. Web site <herbalists.on.ca>. The Canadian Association of Herbal Practitioners can be reached at 403-270-0936.

For a referral to a naturopath in your area, call the Canadian Naturopathic Association at 1-877-628-7284. In BC, call the BC Naturopathic Association at 604-736-6646. In Ontario, call the Ontario Naturopathic Association at 416-233-2001.

