

## WOLFBERRY . . . Ancient Magic or Modern Medicine?



Much myth surrounds the wolfberry, an herb reported by ancient cultures to possess unearthly powers.

Though it is considered to be an American plant by dictionary definition not many North Americans have even heard of this herb. However, if you mention the name to those living in China or Vietnam they nod immediately and reply, "Oh yes, my mother uses this herb in her soup every day because it is good for the eyes." Ancient people of Eastern origin used wolfberry fruit to make tea, soup, stew, cereal and wine. They baked with it and chewed the fruit like raisins.

**So what is the secret behind this enigmatic herb? Its potent nutrient value and its very pleasant taste.**

In 1988, the Beijing Nutrition Research Institute conducted detailed chemical analyses and nutritional composition studies of the dried wolfberry fruit. What they discovered was stunning. The wolfberry contained more beta carotene than carrots and an astonishing 500 times more vitamin C by weight than oranges. It has over 19 amino acids (that is six times higher in proportion than bee pollen), 21 trace minerals, and is also packed with vitamin B1, vitamin B2, vitamin B6 and vitamin E.

Perhaps this is why the Asian culture has traditionally attributed so many benefits to the wolfberry. Since ancient times the herb has been used for medicinal purposes including the treatment of diabetes. They claim it protects liver function (we now know it may do this by repairing liver cell injury), replenishes "vital essences" (now thought to be an anti-aging herb with potent anti-oxidants), improves vision (perhaps protecting the retina by neutralizing free radicals from sunlight), and lowers blood pressure and cholesterol. The wolfberry was also said to strengthen muscles and bones, stimulate the heart and treat impotence.

Only over the past 20 to 30 years more intense clinical research unveiled all that wolfberry provides. The studies (most of them performed at technical institutions in China, Australia and America) reveal a wealth of reliable data medically qualifying wolfberry herb's value.

It is suggested that wolfberry's key is linked to liver and kidney function. This explains why people use it for eyesight, which is connected to liver health. Studies show that wolfberry's significant amounts of pro-vitamin A (beta-carotene and cryptoxanthin) improve eye sight and also provide antioxidant activity, anti-aging benefits and enhancements to the immune system. In addition to containing all of the essential amino acids, wolfberry also has a unique group of polysaccharides (complex sugars) that have been shown to benefit immune support and liver protection, in addition to aiding the fight against cancer and diabetes. Other areas that are currently being investigated include weight loss, energy enhancement and lowering of blood pressure. In general, it appears wolfberry has much to offer with few or no side effects.

Wolfberry is the fruit of the plant *Lycium barbarum*, a spiny shrub that grows to about 2.5 meters in height. Other parts of the plant, specifically the roots, are also used for medicinal purposes. This *Lycium* plant is native to East Asia and Eastern Europe. It is widely grown as a cultivated crop in almost all parts of China and some other regions of Asia. Wolfberry can also be found in the Middle

East, Britain and parts of North America, including Canada. In China the best quality wolfberries are found in the provinces of Ningxia, Gansu and Qinghai.

Since most of the value of the berries lies in their skin, it's crucial that the extraction process uses a method that "leaches" the cells in the skin to the fullest extent. Tinctures are macerated for at least three weeks to allow for a maximum yield. One extraction technique uses fermentation. It actively ruptures cell walls and the yeast enzymes and helps the breakdown of cells to allow for full extraction of valuable components. Preparations are in concentrated liquid extracts, and only small amounts need to be used. The constituents of the wolfberry extract go to work almost instantaneously after ingestion.

It should be mentioned that eating raw berries may result in bloating or even diarrhea, which might be caused by microorganisms on the berries. Cooking helps but the nutritional value is obviously reduced by this process. Do your research and find out how to best put this powerful herb to work for you.

### **Wolfberry General Information**

Wolfberry is a sweet herb that grows wild in the remote areas of central China near inner Mongolia, but is also grown as a cultivated plant throughout Asia, Britain, the Middle East and North America. Wolfberry has been studied by Chinese physicians for thousands of years for use in treatments ranging from replenishing vital essences to strengthening and restoring major organs, and boosting the immune system. Chinese wolfberries contain more than 19 amino acids, 21 trace minerals, more beta carotene than carrots, and 500 times more vitamin C than oranges. It also has high amounts of vitamin B1, B6 and E, and is a powerful antioxidant with anti-aging properties.

### **Wolfberry Uses & Scientific Evidence**

Wolfberry fruits are used to help maintain overall health when suffering from chronic conditions, such as tired muscles and joints, dizziness and ringing in the ear, visual degeneration, headaches, insomnia, chronic liver diseases, diabetes, tuberculosis, and hypertension. Using this herb can also help improve overall liver health, and balance blood pressure and blood sugar levels. The berries of this herb work as a liver and kidney tonic and in Chinese medicine, the liver is associated with the eye health. Preliminary studies have shown that Wolfberry is effective in treating or preventing visual degeneration, such as cataracts, retinopathy, or macular degeneration. The berries also protect the liver from damage caused by exposure to toxins. The Chinese use the root to reduce fevers, sweating, irritability, and thirst. It can also stop nosebleeds, vomiting of blood, and soothe coughs and wheezing associated colds.