



Presenting September's Plant Ally:

Astragalus

Common names: Milkvetch, Mongolian milkvetch, Yellow Leader, Huáng Qí

Botanical name: Astragalus membranaceus (syn. Astragalus propinquus)

Family: Fabaceae

Energetics: Warm & sweet

Taste: Sweet, neutral

Parts Used: Root

Constituents: Polysaccharides, triterpenoids, isoflavones, glycosides, saponins

Actions/Functions: Adaptogen (especially in the nervous, immune, & endocrine systems), antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antiviral, diuretic, immune system modulator, tonic, & stimulant, vasodilator

September brings us to a great balancing point... Summer is officially slipping away, the wind tugging on its hems. The berries, the seeds, the grains are all available to us & we can watch the world busy in the gathering of them both in the animal world & on our farms, in our own gardens. Perhaps the leaves have begun to shift their colors where you are. Just this morning, I noticed that the Mulberry trees in my backyard have begun to yellow in places & even drop some of their leaves! We are moving towards Autumn, one of my most cherished times of the year, & we will celebrate its arrival on the 22nd of September, the Equinox. This is a time of complete balance in light & it is on this date that we are officially ushered into the Fall.

Autumn gives many gifts to the world: harmony, reflection, grounding, release, & cooler temperatures are amongst them. It is a time to begin to gather roots for food & medicine, now that the energy has begun to return back to these underground parts of the plants. In Chinese medicine, this time of the year is associated with lungs, grief, inspiration, & spirit. In Western traditions, we also see a lot of focus on the lungs & immune system during this time. In fact, it is extremely common to come down with respiratory ails during the Autumn season, it is full of transition, wind, rain, & chill. All of this, I promise, relates to our plant ally this month: Astragalus! To be honest, I am still getting to learn this plant myself but I am excited to share what I have gleamed from it in this monograph.

Astragalus is also the name of the botanical genus—it is quite a large genus of plants in the Fabaceae or Pea family. The name Astragalus comes from Latin via the Greek *astrágalos* meaning ‘ankle bone, molding.’ I love this etymology, because I have always felt that the root slices of this plant resemble slivers of bone & I consider this to be one of its doctrine of signatures, which I will go further into below. The species name, *membranaceus*, is from the Latin *membrāna* meaning ‘skin, membrane.’ This is also a beautiful name for this plant’s medicine, because I often think of Astragalus for repairing our “shields,” & one of our most obvious shields is our skin which amongst other functions is a huge part of our immune systems.

I first learned about Astragalus as a nourishing & deep immune system tonic, with a specific affinity for the lungs & respiratory system, which it both strengthens & tones. Because of its tonic quality, it is an amazing ally for preventative care, helping to protect by building & stimulating the immune system & its responses. Similarly to Echinacea root, it stimulates white blood cell production. However, Astragalus also helps to restore the very place from which white blood cells are born. In *Information on Astragalus* by Christopher Hobbs, he notes that Astragalus is able to rejuvenate our red bone marrow reserve (which is where the cells that produce white blood cells live), making it is an extremely *bone deep* remedy—hence the doctrine of signatures I alluded to above. Because of how effective Astragalus is for the prevention of both bacterial & viral infections, it makes a really powerful plant to have on hand if you live or work closely with children, in hospitals (in China it is common to

have an injection in hospitals!), or if you are prone to getting sick easily especially in the colder months & especially in the upper respiratory system.

Because Astragalus is such a deep-acting herb, it is recommended to use it only when you are *not* already ill. Again, it is definitely more of a preventative herb when used over long periods of time in a healthy state. This is not to say it can't be used in acute conditions, but if you've tried it & got the cold or flu anyhow, it is best to stop taking it until you have recovered. I always heard it said that Astragalus was so powerful at rebuilding our immune "shields" that it would trap illness inside if one were to take it while sick. On that same token, it is considered contraindicated for people with autoimmune issues, as it could stimulate the immune system too much & it could possibly interfere with drugs that are meant to suppress the immune system, so be sure to use this remedy with care.

In Chinese medicine, the lungs are associated with the emotion of grief. I think Astragalus is a great remedy to have around when you are in the later stages of healing from being grief-stricken, whatever the root cause is. In drop doses, it helps to give us the extra strength needed if we keep sliding down the hill again, into the muck & mud. It helps to soothe us, but also to lift us up & gives us strength. Similarly, it is really nice for repairing the integrity of our lungs & breath after long-standing grief, where the person has a weakness in their lungs or will just keep getting sick there. Again, you won't want to use this in the throws of grief & sadness, but rather afterwards, when the spirit has done all that it can to heal on its own but you just need a little help from the Angelic realm to really close the wound. As we know, on a physiological level, the heart & lungs are intimately connected—so always look to lung support where there is heartache! I also believe that Astragalus would be a great ally for those who are a little *too* open to the Spirit realm, especially for those who tend to float away with Spirit but have a hard time coming home to themselves. In drops doses, I imagine that it will help to create a natural boundary & reminder of the good, nurturing weight of your own body.

A few last thoughts on the energetic/emotional uses I have found for Astragalus. As has been mentioned a few times, Astragalus seems to act like a strong shield for the immune system, which is the warrior within us. I also think it acts this way on an energetic level. Imagine that it has the ability to repair any of the damaged shield you may have experienced in your own energy field, on your own armor. Because it is such a deep diver, Astragalus also helps us to go below the surface, to open up to intimacy—which is especially nice for people who like to just stay on a surface level, so as to protect their deeper, most authentic self. The taste is sweet & soothing but the texture is firm & fibrous, which speaks nicely to how it acts in our bodies: Astragalus gently anchors us in, helping to take us out of our headspace & into our heart-space sweetly but firmly.

The best way to prepare Astragalus medicine is in a nutritive soup or as a water-based extraction. This is due to its high polysaccharide content, which is not soluble in alcohol. I have had some great Astragalus tinctures before, prepared in a double extraction technique (like that of mushrooms), but I do think it is best as a tea or in food. Other than soup, a traditional way to prepare it is to stir fry the root in some honey! I would even add a few sesame seeds in there, too for some extra flavor & texture. Personally, I have also loved it as an infused-oil, especially if you like body oiling as a means of soothing the nervous system & adding an extra layer of protection over the skin/a nice barrier between the outside world & your own world. As such, I have found it to be a potent friend for repairing our energetic & physical barriers when used as an oil, but I have never met anyone else who uses Astragalus this way ~ so just experiment, see how you like it!



A Widdershins Ritual :::::::::::

for strengthening the lungs & building our shields

you'll need:

2 parts Organic Astragalus root, dried & sliced

1 part dried Turkey tails mushrooms (optional)

1/2 part dried peels of tangerines (my favorite) or oranges

A dash of cinnamon chips, or a few crushed cinnamon sticks to taste

A mason jar ~ size depends on how much of your blend you will make!

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On the Autumnal Equinox (22.September), face towards the west/sunset. Recite the following incantation as you blend all of your ingredients together, gently stirring counter-clockwise or moonwise. You can repeat as often as you see fit:

Summers come & summers go

Ripened seeds that I've sown

The work's begun to bring them home

Wisping wind it picks up speed

Curls its wings all round me

Shifting light & falling leaves

Reminds me that the Earth, too, breathes

Inhale, exhale rhythmic flow

Wisping wind begins to blow

Fall is lung time of the year,

Let us tend, release, & clear

— Once you have mixed your blend well, carefully pour it into your mason jar, cap it, & label it with the ingredients

— Enjoy this blend as a decoction daily, if you run dry make some more! This will be sure to banish windy spirits that muck up your respiratory system, while bringing strength to your lungs & keeping you healthy all through the cold seasons



Lovingly yours /
Chanelle + Astragalus