

## Licorice Root

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**Common Names**—licorice root, licorice, liquorice, Spanish licorice, sweet root, gan zao (Chinese licorice)  
**Latin Names**—Glycyrrhiza glabra, Glycyrrhiza uralensis (Chinese licorice)

**Licorice root is the most frequently used herb among more than 700 kinds of Chinese herbs commonly used in Chinese medicine therapies.** According to statistics, prescriptions containing licorice root account for 79% or more. The history of using licorice root, whether in the East or the West, can track back to 4000 years ago. Licorice has also been used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) to treat conditions ranging from diabetes to tuberculosis. Many “licorice” products manufactured in the U.S. actually don't contain any licorice. Instead, they contain anise oil, which has the characteristic smell and taste of “black licorice.”



Licorice is a perennial herb native to southern Europe, Asia and the Mediterranean. It is extensively cultivated in Russia, Spain, Iran and India, and is one of the most popular and widely consumed herbs in the world. Ancient cultures on every continent have used it, the first recorded use by the Egyptians in the 3rd century BC. The Egyptians and the Greeks recognized the benefits in treating coughs and lung disease. The Japanese use a licorice preparation to treat hepatitis.

The two major constituents of licorice, glycyrrhizin and flavonoids, may also exhibit anti-inflammatory effects and inhibit the breakdown of the cortisol produced by the body. Licorice may also have antiviral properties, although this has not been proven in human pharmacological studies. The main constituent found in the root is glycyrrhizin. The plant also contains various sugars (to 14%), starches (30%), flavonoids, saponoids, sterols, amino acids, gums, and essential oil. Glycyrrhizin, stimulates the secretion of the adrenal cortex hormone aldosterone.

Historically, the most common medical use is for treating upper respiratory ailments including coughs, hoarseness, sore throat, and bronchitis though it has also been used for infections caused by bacteria or viruses. Some feel it can be as effective as codeine, and safer, when used as a cough suppressant. It may also be used to soothe a sore throat. Some licorice compounds may be found in cough syrups and cough lozenges as a cough suppressant, as well as a flavoring. Rhizomes in the plant have high mucilage content which, when mixed with water or used in cough drops, soothes irritated mucous membranes. Licorice also appears to have an expectorant effect, which increases the secretion of the bronchial glands. It is these properties that may make it an effective remedy for these ailments. Glycyrrhizin promotes the production of mucus in the respiratory tract. This increase

may make the respiratory tract mucus less sticky and may also promote its removal from the body. Additionally, very sweet substances such as licorice are known to enhance the elimination of mucus from the lungs. Therefore, true licorice has been used with severe respiratory conditions such as bronchitis.

Traditionally, Licorice has also been known to relieve rheumatism, osteoarthritis and arthritis, regulate low blood sugar, and was used for Addison's disease. The root extract produces mild estrogenic effects, and it has proven to be useful for some in treating symptoms of menopause, regulating menstruation, and relieving menstrual cramps.

The list goes on: Licorice has been used for various digestive system complaints including stomach ulcers, heartburn, colic, and ongoing inflammation of the lining of the stomach (chronic gastritis). The chemicals contained in licorice are thought to decrease swelling and increase the chemicals in our body that heal ulcers. Glycyrrhizin specifically reduces the activity of two enzymes that break down prostaglandin E (PGE). Lower than normal levels of PGE have been associated with stomach disorders including colic, stomach inflammation, and ulcers. By inhibiting the body's disposal of PGE, glycyrrhizin allows more PGE to circulate in the body which is believed to promote the production of stomach mucus, whereby decreasing the production of painful and potentially dangerous stomach acids that lead to many stomach conditions. Both effects help to protect stomach tissue; consequently, true licorice has been used in connection with ulcers and other stomach conditions. In test tube studies, the flavonoids of the licorice plant have been shown to kill *Helicobacter pylori*, the bacteria causing most ulcers and stomach inflammation.

Licorice Root has also been used for systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), liver disorders, malaria, tuberculosis, food poisoning, and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). Licorice is sometimes used along with the herbs Panax ginseng and Bupleurum falcatum to improve the function of the adrenal glands, especially in people who have taken steroid drugs long-term. Steroids tend to suppress the activity of the adrenal glands. The adrenal glands produce important hormones that regulate the body's response to stress. In combination with other herbs, licorice has also been used to treat prostate cancer while topical preparations have been used to treat the skin disorder known as eczema.

One human study found that a preparation of licorice might reduce body fat. Fifteen people of normal weight consumed licorice for 2 months (3.5 g a day). Body fat was measured before and after treatment. Licorice appeared to reduce body fat mass and to suppress the hormone aldosterone; however, participants retained more water. Another study found that a topical preparation of glycyrrhetic acid (a component of licorice) was able to reduce the thickness of fat on the thigh in human subjects. A third study found that people who took 900 mg of licorice flavonoid oil daily for 8 weeks experienced significant decreases in body fat, body weight, body mass index, and LDL cholesterol levels.

**People with the following conditions should not take licorice:**

- Heart failure
- Heart disease
- Fluid retention
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Diabetes
- Kidney disease
- Liver disease
- Pregnant or breastfeeding women should not take licorice.

**Licorice with the active ingredient of glycyrrhiza can have serious side effects.** Another type of licorice, called DGL (deglycyrrhizinated licorice), doesn't seem to have the same side effects and is sometimes specifically used to treat peptic ulcers, canker sores, and reflux (GERD).

Licorice is **likely safe** for most people when consumed in amounts found in foods. It is **possibly safe** when

consumed in larger amounts for use as medicine, short-term. However, **it is possibly unsafe** when used in large amounts for more than four weeks. Consuming 30 grams or more of licorice daily for several weeks can cause severe side effects including high blood pressure, low potassium in the blood, weakness, paralysis, and occasionally brain damage in otherwise healthy people. In people who eat a lot of salt or have heart disease, kidney disease, or high blood pressure, as little as 5 grams per day can cause these problems.

Use of any licorice product is not recommended for longer than 4 - 6 weeks.



Be sure to try NSP's [Licorice Root \(100 caps\)](#), [Licorice Root ATC Conc. \(50 caps\)](#), or [Licorice Root Extract \(2 fl. oz.\)](#). [Click Here](#) for a list of NSP products containing Licorice Root.

### References

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**Yours in Good Health!**

Sincerely,

Chris Ritchason  
Dr. Jack & Verlyn Ritchason, Founders  
The Back to Herbs Team

This information was provided by

***Chuck & Judy Erkfitz***

*Natures Better Way*

PO Box 261 - 880 W Dryden Rd., Metamora, MI 48455

[www.naturesbetterway.com](http://www.naturesbetterway.com)

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1-810-678-3131 [erkfitz@erkfitz.com](mailto:erkfitz@erkfitz.com)